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BONODEL, THE BOY ROVER; Or, THE FLAGLESS SCHOONER.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF THE "SEA MARAUDERS," "MERLE, THE MIDDY," "RALPH ROY," ETC., ETC.



"PERISH BY YOUR OWN MADNESS, YOU ACCURSED MUTINEERS!" CRIED THE YOUNG CAPTAIN AS THE EXPLOSION CAME.

Bonodel,
THE BOY ROVER;
 OR,
THE FLAGLESS SCHOONER.

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CHAPTER I.

Three Pen Pictures Which the Story Explains.

THE FIRST.

UPON an island in the far-away sea a man stood looking out upon the restless waters that fell with monotonous sound upon the shore.

Afar off a stately vessel lay becalmed, and upon it, as the hull rose and fell with the undulation of the sea, the eyes of the man were fixed, and the look in his face was that of one who was suffering some great sorrow.

The island upon which he stood had a barren coast, but all within was beautiful with verdure, and a more inviting spot in which to dwell heart could not wish, had it not been the abiding-place of a cruel and savage people.

More than a year before that man, who gazed with a hungry look in his eyes, had been cast upon that island one night of storm, along with his young wife and child, and there, the slaves of the island savages, they had since made their home.

The wife, a woman of rare beauty, had been forced, by the laws of the tribe, to have her face, neck and arms tattooed in red, black and blue inks in strange devices, while the broad breast of the man and that of his little son had also undergone the same hideous tattooing process.

The woman's beauty of complexion and features had been forever destroyed, though her superb form and glorious eyes remained, and to him who had loved her and made her his wife, she had become an object of loathing, instead of pity.

So feeling toward her, the man with his love turned to hatred, now saw a chance to desert that loving wife and child, who, for his sake, had so suffered, and seek for himself succor from the cruel life they had led among their cruel captors.

If caught in the attempt to escape, he knew that death would be his fate; but that were better than such a life.

As he stood there among the rocks with the last rays of the setting sun falling upon him, he looked the very embodiment of magnificent manhood in both stature and face, and the expression of nobleness that rested upon his clearly-cut features, belied the deed of perfidy he was contemplating.

It was a chance of escape, but a desperate one, for the vessel lay a league and a half distant, and, with the setting of the sun the breeze might spring up to bear it on its way, leaving him alone and despairing in the sea.

But death now had no terrors for him, and, glancing cautiously about him to see that he was not watched, he crept into the water and struck boldly out for his long swim.

Ere his head had disappeared upon the waters, a woman, leading a little boy, noiselessly walked down to the rocky point the man had just left.

She had seen him from the leafy covert back on the hill, swim away from the island, and she said earnestly, addressing the little child:

"Percy, your father has swum out to yonder gallant ship to bring it to our succor, and soon we will go back to dear old England."

"We will be happy then, mother, and you will not weep as you do now," said the boy.

"Yes, we will be happy then," sadly responded the woman, and she kept her eyes upon the dark object which she knew to be her husband's head.

Beautiful in form, and clad in a strange costume made of the feathers of birds, she was yet fearful to gaze upon, for her face, neck and arms were disfigured with weird characters tattooed into the once unsullied skin.

The boy, with only a girdle of feathers about his waist, to which hung a short skirt, had a strange device upon his breast, but his face and hands were not deformed by the tattoo.

Bending forward as she gazed, the woman kept her eyes upon the waters, breathlessly watching, until she saw in the gathering gloom, her husband drawn on board the vessel, which

now felt the freshening breeze and glided swiftly away.

"Oh, God! Percy, my son, your father is not coming to save us.

"No! no! no! he has sailed away in yonder ship and left us to our cruel fate, and to die.

"Die! no I will not die! I will live to have a cruel revenge upon that man whom once I loved, whom now I hate with the very venom of hatred.

"Ay, I swear it!" and she dropped upon her knees and raised her clasped hands toward Heaven, just as a band of half-naked and tattooed savages ran down to the water's edge and gazed upon the receding ship, which only then had attracted their attention.

THE SECOND.

In a handsome home, in the city of New Orleans, a man was pacing to and fro, his head bent down, his hands clasped behind his back.

The room was elegantly furnished, and yet there was that in it to rivet the eye, so that the surroundings would remain unnoticed.

That one thing was a coffin, sable, silver-mounted and containing an occupant, a white-faced, handsome man who had been cut off in the flower of his life.

A dark-blue stain upon the forehead, the mark where a cruel bullet had cut its way, showed the cause of death, and the dead face was stamped with a wondering, pained look, as though he had died under some fearful shock that had come unexpectedly upon him.

The man who paced to and fro, the solitary watcher in the room of death, was the same one who had stood, three years before, upon that island, the abode of savages, gazing out upon a ship becalmed, which, after a desperate struggle he had reached.

Dressed now in the fashion of the times, living among his human kind, he no longer wore a hunted, suffering look, and possessed the elegant manners of the polished man of the world.

Halting by the side of the coffined dead, he said half aloud:

"Well, Bonodel, it was your life or mine, for I have madly loved your beautiful wife, since first I beheld her, and, with you out of the way I could win her, I well knew.

"I tried to give you free rein to destroy yourself, but you would not go free, to your own destruction, so I entrapped you, got you into speculations until possessed of your fortune, and then, when you did not blow your own brains out in despair, I did it for you, and gave you the credit of it, and now I will win your bride as well as your gold— Ha! boy, what do you want?"

The man started, as a slight form glided into the room.

It was a boy of nine, with a dark, handsome face, strangely like the one in the coffin.

"To see my dead father, Seuor Ramon," was the low reply, and the man shrunk from the look the boy fastened upon him as he walked to the side of the coffin and bending over pressed a kiss upon the forehead of the dead.

A few hours more and the dead man lay beneath the earth, and the boy, and his little sister, were the only comforts of the sorrowing wife and mother, who returned to the handsome home made desolate by death.

A few minutes more and the man, who had just spoken by the coffin of the one he had slain, left the house of him who had trusted him as a friend, swearing vengeance against the beautiful young widow, who had utterly refused his love, urged as she was to do so by her boy, though for that boy's sake and his sister's she would have accepted, to give them a home and luxuries.

A year more, and the vengeance of Don Ramon had fallen, for his victims, driven from riches to want, had become almost vagabonds upon the face of the earth and the young mother, with her cup of bitterness running over, had to mourn the loss of her little girl, who had been stolen from her side and taken none knew whither.

Then the mother died of a broken heart, and the boy, Mark Bonodel, became a homeless wanderer upon the sea, for ashore he had not where to lay his head, and he hoped to find, in drifting about, his little sister.

Thus, while his fond wife and child had been left to die among cruel savages, and his other victims had felt his revenge, Don Rudolpho Ramon had prospered, for a strange fatality often has it so.

THE THIRD.

The third picture lies in the old city of San Augustine, and in a villa that stood long years ago near that ancient port.

It was a lordly house, built by a Spaniard of wealth, an exile, and then drifted from his hands into the possession of a person who had bought it for cash, and fitted it up with princely liberality.

Of this new owner little or nothing was known by the San Augustinians, and little they cared, so he spent his gold freely, which he did.

He gave his name as Seuor Rudolph Ramon, and of his antecedents wisely held his peace.

He had his grand home fitted up with every luxury, his kennels were full of hounds for hunting, his stables well-supplied with horses, and in the cove that formed the harbor of the villa, were boats and yachts, while a score of trusty servants stood ready to obey his bidding.

In hermit-like seclusion he lived, while rumors floated about that he had been a pirate and had settled down to enjoy the benefit of his red earned spoils.

Others had it that he was a Spaniard, who had been forced to fly from Spain for insurrection against his king, while still more called him a French exile.

Within the library of his house he sat one night, seemingly brooding over some unpleasant subject.

One glance, as he sat there, was sufficient to show that it was the same man who deserted his wife and son upon the far-away island among savages, and afterward made Mark Bonodel and his family the victims of his cruel revenge.

Rising to his feet suddenly and with an impatient imprecation, he said:

"By Heaven! I dare not remain here, now that Rita Restel has escaped from me and while I know that that boy is at large—ay, and the woman and her son whom I once called my wife and child.

"Bah! but it is fearful to think that I may fall and they may triumph after all.

"No, no, no! that cannot be, for have I not gold to buy men and women, body and soul?"

"Let me think, and see just what I have to fear.

"In the olden time I loved that woman, or thought I did, and we were wrecked on that fearful island.

"The savages made her hideous in my eyes, and I deserted her and our boy.

"From that day I prospered, and meeting Bonodel's family I loved his wife, and plotted his death that she might marry me.

"Curse her! through the advice of her nine-year-old boy she refused me; but I had my revenge, for she is dead, her boy an outcast vagabond, and her daughter I stole from her and gave to a fisherman to rear as his own child.

"Still prospering, as the agent of pirates to sell their booty, and a money-lender for the rich, I met the woman who has but now escaped me, and who was the bride of a buccaneer.

"With her pirate husband banded, I hoped to win her for my wife, and brought her here when I fled from New Orleans.

"But the beauty I kept in her gilded prison refused me, and has now escaped me to bury herself within the walls of a convent; while I, with the knowledge I have of that tattooed fiend's escape from the island and her attempt upon my life, together with the fact that the boy, Bono, whom I trusted so well as my confidential clerk, was none other than Bonodel's son, seeking revenge upon me, must needs seek safety elsewhere than here.

"The woman—Witch of the Isle, as they call her—believed that she poisoned me, and then she fled with her son.

"The boy, Bono, believed that he had shut me up in my gold vault to die; and then, accused of being my murderer, he set out in search of his sister, and began well in stealing from that giant pirate his schooner, in which he is now cruising, hunting everywhere for the little girl I gave to the fisherman.

"The woman and her son, my spy brings me word, are located upon some island in the Gulf, while the boy, Bonodel, is afloat in a fine vessel; and once they know that I am not dead, as they believe, once they know that the Seuor Ramon is none other than Don Rudolpho, the money-lender, I will be hunted to the death.

"Well, there is but one way that I can see safety for myself, and that way I will take and at once; so farewell to this life of luxury I lead here."

The very next day a great surprise fell upon San Augustine, for the grand old home of the rich Seuor Ramon was turned into a Monastery, and the master himself had put on the somber gown of a padre, forever giving up the world, its follies, pleasures and its sins.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLAGLESS CRUISER.

A VESSEL was gliding swiftly along over the blue waters of the Gulf, at a time prior to the beginning of the present century.

The land was not far distant, and her course lay along the winding shores of Florida, then a most dangerous locality for an honest craft to be found in.

What nationality the vessel belonged to was not discernible, for she carried no colors; but her build and rig indicated that she was an American, while her armed decks gave the suggestion of her being a cruiser, and the very rakish look she wore was suggestive of piracy as her calling.

Her hull was very sharp and narrow, lay low amidships, but rose quite high in bow and stern, and her masts were exceedingly tall, slender, and raked well aft.

The amount of canvas the tall masts and long spars showed she could carry, was indicative of a vessel which depended upon speed in her cruising, an idea that her trim, sharp hull carried out.

Her armament consisted of but four pivot-guns, all of heavy caliber, and so mounted as to form a broadside that was most formidable for a vessel of her size.

Muskets, boarding-pikes, pistols and cutlasses were in racks along the bulwarks, every rope was in its place, the decks as clean as a New England housewife's kitchen, and her crew, of fifty men, neatly attired in white duck pants, blue jackets and red skull-caps, seemed to know their place.

The wind, though light, sent her along at a merry pace, under mizzenail, foresail and jib, and all on board seemed to be lazily enjoying the balmy afternoon and the forest-clad shores of Florida.

Upon the quarter-deck stood three individuals who were evidently her officers, two of them being men of middle age, the third a youth under twenty, and the latter wore the rank of captain, for gold lace, and a gold tassel adorned his blue jacket and red cap, where those who stood near him had silver.

The face of the youth was a study, for in it dwelt beauty of expression, perfection of feature and stern manliness so blended as to win respect and love, and command admiration and awe at the same time.

His form was above the medium height, slender, graceful, and withal full of latent power and activity.

His hands and feet were very small, his movements quick and firm, and the eyes were so full of pathos and fire, so finely blended, that one could hardly tell which was paramount.

About his slender waist was a sash of gold thread, and in it were stuck two pistols, gold-mounted, while by a chain of linked blocks of gold hung a Turkish cimeter, the hilt studded with precious stones.

His two lieutenants were men with strong faces, evidently old sailors, and one of them seemed to look up to the young captain with respect, which his character, as well as his rank commanded; but the other was a man whose countenance was unreadable, yet looked treacherous.

Suddenly the startling cry came from the lookout aloft:

"Sail ho!"

There was no need of the youthful captain asking:

"Whereaway?"

The sail was visible to all, for it shot suddenly out from a wooded point of land into full view.

An armed vessel, not more than half the size of the schooner, and with a far smaller crew, her men were seen at their guns and all ready for action.

At her peak floated the American flag, and there was no doubt in the fact that she had long before sighted the large schooner and was coming out to fight her.

"Put the schooner under increased sail, Senor Sutro, and helmsman, let her fall off sharp," ordered the young officer.

"You will run from them, Captain Bonodel?" asked the second lieutenant, with a look of some impatience.

"Certainly, Mr. Merton."

"She could not hold her own against us for five minutes, sir."

"I am well aware of that, sir."

The lieutenant shook his head, and seeing it, the youthful captain remarked:

"Mr. Merton, I thought that you knew that my intention was to fight no craft, and that I

was neither cruising the seas as a pirate or smuggler, but for an avowed purpose."

"I do, sir; but yonder craft has dogged our steps so persistently that I hoped you would be willing to give her a lesson."

"No, I shall do no such thing, and I understand, that being an Englishman, you would like me to fire upon the American flag; but I shall not under any circumstances, do so."

"Not if she fires upon us?"

"No, sir— Ha! there comes a shot now, and it is for us to show our colors."

"I'll guarantee if you run up the black flag she will quickly turn and run."

"This schooner has no flag, sir, as you know, Mr. Merton, so let me have no more of this interference upon your part," and the young captain turned away to watch the effect of the shot from the little vessel, which was evidently an American cruiser.

The first shot failing in its intention, a second was fired, and it cut the head off the man at the wheel, and then sped on its way.

Springing to the place of the slain seaman, Captain Bonodel called out:

"Forward therel send two men to this wheel!"

The order was promptly obeyed just as a third shot came, cutting away the maintop-mast, which came to the deck with a crash.

But still the schooner held on her way, her men anxious to go to quarters, yet held in check by the eye of their youthful commander.

Seeing that her fire was not returned the cruiser spread more sail, to gain on the schooner, and opened hotly from her bow gun, which was a thirty-two-pounder, mounted upon a pivot.

"With a vessel, armament and crew that can sink yonder American cruiser in a few moments, we are running like whipped curs," growled Lieutenant Merton, as he walked forward among the men.

His words reached the ears of Captain Bonodel, but no impression seemed made upon him by them, for his face remained impassive, and he calmly watched the little cruiser, coming on under full sail in chase.

"We are gaining, Senor Sutro, and will soon run out of range— Ha! he sees it, and we are to get a broadside," he added quickly, as he saw the cruiser fall rapidly off to present her broadside.

"Down all to the deck!" he shouted, as the smoke burst from the muzzles of the guns, and in obedience every man threw himself flat upon his face, though the daring captain, a mere boy in years, never moved, or changed a muscle.

A crashing of timbers, the flying of splinters, cries, curses and groans, and the iron hail had passed on and left its red mark.

"Ho, lads! will you be murdered through the command of yonder boy?"

"Up and follow me, and we will float the black flag over this deck, and hurl every man into the sea who will not follow our cruise to fortune."

The words came from the lips of the fault-finding lieutenant, Merton, and, drawing his cutlass he ran aft, followed by fully one-half the crew.

"Ha! is this mutiny?" cried the young captain, turning toward the men rushing aft, armed with pistols and cutlasses, and led by the treacherous lieutenant.

"Ay, mutiny it is, boy, and into the sea you go, first of all," fairly yelled the enraged mutineer leader.

It was a critical moment, for the schooner had been crippled by the loss of her maintop-mast, and Lieutenant Sutro and several of the men were in the rigging, endeavoring to repair the damage, while a gun had been dismounted amidships, and three or four of the crew lay dead upon the decks, cut down by the cruiser's broadside.

Aft with him were only the two men at the wheel, and astern, not a mile distant, the cruiser was rushing on in chase, while mutiny reigned rampant on the flying craft at whose peak no flag floated.

But Mark Bonodel, boy though he was, stood undismayed in face of the fearful peril, while Merton and his mutineers advanced upon him.

Then, as he saw that he must act and promptly, he sprung to the pivot gun mounted aft of amidships, turned it upon the mutineers and applied the lighted end of his *cigarrito* to the priming.

"Perish by your own madness, you accursed mutineers!" cried the young captain as the explosion came.

The maddened traitors too late saw their danger, and shrank back, their leader now al-

most up to the gun's muzzle, vainly striving to throw himself below its range, as the red smoke burst forth and hurled a load of grape upon the treacherous crew, while in its flight it also cut down several who had not joined in the mutiny.

The scene that followed the discharge of the gun was fearful, for a dozen men lay dead and dying upon the decks, others had sprung overboard into the sea; and crouching in dismay along the bulwarks were those who had remained true, and yet knew not what would be the next act of their young captain, now standing like a mad tiger at bay.

"Ho, lads! have you had enough of your treachery?" he called out, in a stern voice.

"Ay, ay, sir," came the cheerful response, while to the side of Bonodel sprung the Senor Sutro, and the men he had with him in the rigging, the lieutenant crying:

"By the dogs of war, Captain Bonodel, but you quelled that mutiny before I could get to you, and have blown Merton and his band to their master, the devil.

"Ho, lads! throw the bodies of these traitors into the sea, and spring to your posts of duty, or yonder fleet cruiser will knock us out of the water," and the faithful officer went forward among the men, who were glad enough to have the matter end as it had, while the Flagless Schooner swept on her way, leaving those among the mutineers who had sprung overboard to find a watery grave, or to be picked up by the pursuing cruiser.

CHAPTER III.

THE INDIAN PILOT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the very great danger which the young captain had found himself and his vessel in, his nerve and prompt action had quickly made him master of the situation, and once more forced those under him to acknowledge him as the ruling spirit.

The discontented seamen on board, really about half the crew, had been urged on by Merton the lieutenant, who, upon seeing vessel after vessel go by, which he knew to be richly freighted, and not captured by the schooner's commander, who also fled from war vessels of all nationalities, had determined to himself take command at some convenient time and become what he had been before—a pirate.

He had shipped, with the rest of the crew, for the performance of some mysterious duty, though what that duty was, he could not guess.

The schooner had proven herself the fastest craft he had ever seen, and yet her speed had been of no avail in the eyes of the lieutenant.

Merchant vessels, carrying any flag, had all been brought to, boarded by the schooner's captain, who, after a conversation with their captains, had allowed them to go on their way unmolested.

Above the schooner no flag had ever been hoisted, nor had she ever fired a gun, except to bring a vessel to, or in practice, while, though a match for any craft of her size, she had shown her heels to even little coast-guard gunboats, and when fired upon had never returned the fire.

The officers and crew had been liberally paid their wages agreed upon, their stores were never allowed to grow scant, and they were well treated; but this did not explain the mystery, and some of the crew grew nervous and were fit subjects for the treacherous lieutenant to work upon.

Their commander had shown himself a thorough seaman, and he had enlisted them to aid him in seizing the schooner from the pirate known as the Sea Monster, and they knew him to be fearless and daring, but had not expected that he would face them in a general mutiny.

His rapid quelling of their uprising had utterly cowed them, and in silence the traitors submitted to the chaffing of their shipmates who had not joined them.

With his crew in perfect subjection once more, Captain Bonodel devoted his attention to escaping from the cruiser, and it was not very long before he began to drop his pursuers astern.

The cruiser however hung on well and kept up a constant fire, which did more or less damage, for those on board had seen that something was wrong on the flagless vessel, and the firing of the heavy gun and turmoil soon told them that there was a mutiny in progress, and they hoped for the speedy capture of the mysterious craft which they had often before chased, and knew to be creating almost a supernatural dread of her upon the high seas.

Great disappointment therefore was felt upon the cruiser when they saw the mutiny quelled, more sail set, and the fleet schooner dropping

Bonodel, the Boy Rover.

them at a pace that by nightfall would leave them more than a league astern.

But the cruiser's fire was kept up until the shots fell short, and soon after night coming on the mysterious craft with no flag above her decks faded out of the sight of her pursuers.

When the cruiser was no longer visible Captain Bonodel ordered the schooner to be put under easy sail, and at once headed back for the coast.

The dawn found him gliding slowly along within a mile of the shore and no other sail in sight.

Coming on deck the young captain turned his eyes upon the white sandy shore and its dark background of forest.

"Lower away a boat, lads! Lively all of you, and, helmsman, bring her to."

The cry aroused the drowsy watch, and the orders being obeyed with alacrity, the boat was pulled rapidly away toward the shore, the schooner lying to the while.

In the stern sat Captain Bonodel, and six men were at the oars.

Straight for a wooded point the Boy Captain headed, and it was now evident what had caused his sudden orders and pull shoreward, for a man was visible there standing at bay against a dozen wild looking fellows, who had driven him to the waters' edge and were still pressing him hard with cutlass and boarding-pikes.

The man at bay was naked to the waist, and his bronzed body and long black hair showed that he was an Indian.

Leggins incased his nether limbs, moccasins were upon his feet, and a red band in which were stuck gayly-dyed feathers was upon his head.

His arms were simply a knife grasped in his right hand, and a tomahawk in his left, and with these he had halted to defend his life to the last.

That his death must follow, against such odds he well knew; but he would die with his face to the foe.

Who the Indian was, or what his quarrel with the men, Mark Bonodel did not know or care. He was one against many, and he stood ready to make a good fight; hence the young sailor would aid him.

The Indian had not seen the schooner, in his flight to the beach, nor had his pursuers, until the boat was almost upon them.

"Rush on the red varmint an' cut him ter pieces!" yelled the leader of the party, and the order was about to be obeyed when Mark Bonodel called out:

"Cease rowing! seize your cutlasses, men, and follow me!"

These words brought the boat into notice, and the Indian wheeled around in a startled way, while his assailants checked their intended rush upon him.

Just at that moment the boat grounded, and Mark Bonodel sprung ashore, followed by his men, and as he did so a shot from his pistol brought the leader of the Indian's foes to the ground.

"At them, lads, for they are the Reef Buccaneers!" shouted the Boy Captain, and with a cheer his party rushed forward to the attack, the Indian joining them, and his war-cry sending many an echo back from the dense forest.

But the Reef Wreckers, or Buccaneers, for they were both, did not await the attack, for with the schooner now in full view, they turned in full flight, leaving their dead leader where he had fallen.

"Heap good, young Sea Chief! Save Pasquagoula life," said the Indian, turning toward Mark Bonodel, who gazed upon him with admiration.

The Indian was almost a giant in form, straight as an arrow, broad-shouldered, and with muscular arms which a blacksmith might have been proud of.

His face was noble, intelligent and full of daring.

"I am glad to have saved Pasquagoula, and we will be friends," answered Bonodel, grasping the bronzed hand extended to him.

"Yes, heap friends, for Pasquagoula go with young chief."

"What! to sea?"

"Yes, me sea Injun."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, me heap good sea Injun; sail boat, know reef, know bayou. Pasquagoula have village one time, but bad pale-face come and kill his people, so take trail of Reef Pirates, and kill, too."

"Pasquagoula have kill plenty, so go with young white chief now."

"Are you the Indian Pilot I have heard that American vessels-of-war have had to guide them against the haunts of the Reef Buccaneers?" asked Bonodel.

"Yes, me Injun Pilot, and heap good," was the quiet remark.

"Then, you are just the man I want, and we will indeed be friends," said Captain Bonodel, delightedly.

"Yes, Pasquagoula be heap good friend of young chief, and make him plenty rich, for Injun chief have secret," and the latter part of the sentence he whispered in the young sailor's ear, so that the men should not hear.

"You know a secret?" asked the youth in the same low tone.

"Yes, Pasquagoula heap good Injun Pilot, and know secret island where plenty gold and pretty beads—see, have some beads here," and he took from his waist-belt a pouch of buckskin, and pouring out some of the contents, Mark Bonodel fairly started, as he saw that they were not beads, but *precious stones*."

He glanced quickly toward his men, but was glad to see that they were busy examining the body of the dead wrecker, and said:

"Let Pasquagoula keep his secret from my men, for it might cost him his life."

"Injun no fool, for he know pale-face fight and kill for gold; but Pasquagoula love young white chief and be his friend, so will go with him and make him heap rich, for he save chief's life."

Again he extended his hand, and grasping it, Mark Bonodel led the way to his boat, deeply impressed with the knowledge that the Indian Pilot did indeed know the hiding-place of some treasure of gold and precious stones.

Having heard of an Indian Pilot, who knew the reefs, bayous and islands of the Florida coast as he did his mother's face, and who had often guided American vessels-of-war against the wreckers and buccaneers that infested them, he was more than glad to know that the Pasquagoula chief was the one he had saved from death.

The Indian told how he cruised along the coast in his winged canoe, devoting his days to avenging his people, slain by the wreckers, and it was when asleep on shore he had been surprised by a party, who, recognizing him, had given chase, and would have slain him but for the timely arrival of the Boy Captain and his men.

This succor at once caused the Indian to form a friendship for the youth that death alone could sever, and, as the schooner sailed on her way once more, he stood by the side of his rescuer and repeated over and over again:

"Young chief save Pasquagoula."

"Injun know secret, and make him heap rich."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TELL-TALE LOCKET.

IT was night, and the waters of the Bahama Islands were lashed by a gale that swept over them, hurling huge waves upon the reefs with ominous roar, and tossing upon their crested top a stanch craft that, under reefed sails, was holding on her course dead to windward.

Fleeting clouds across the skies now and then obscured the moon from view, and at such times the sea looked black and threatening; but when the reefs pierced the dark masses, the spray lighted up like diamonds, and the ocean appeared like liquid silver.

At such a time, when the moon shone forth in all her beauty, lighting up the hull, deck and rigging of the vessel, it displayed the same rakish schooner which the reader has seen mysteriously fly from a foe far her inferior.

Her men were at their posts, for those were dangerous waters by day, and her Boy Captain stood near the wheel, the latter held in the grasp of the Indian Pilot, Pasquagoula.

Alone he held the wheel in his powerful grasp, and kept the schooner on her way.

"You certainly know these waters well, Pasquagoula, to run the gantlet of the rock islands and reefs about us in such a sea, and in darkness," said Mark Bonodel, as the Indian Pilot let the vessel fall off to avoid a huge rock, and then skillfully brought her up when a reef appeared upon the other bow.

"Me know sea heap well," was the calm reply.

"Sail ho!"

The cry startled all on board the schooner, for what other vessel could possibly be abroad in those waters they wondered.

"Whereaway?" called out Mark, raising his glass quickly.

"Three points off the weather bow, sir."

"Ah, yes, I see her— Ha! she has disappeared."

"Gone under lee island, lower sail, drop iron hooks, so can't see her," said the Indian.

"Ah, say you so, chief?"

"Yes, for island of rock yonder."

"It was a sloop, and under reefed mainsail and jib; but it disappeared almost as soon as I caught sight of it."

"Bad pale-face wrecker," was the quiet response of the Indian.

"I do not doubt it, Pasquagoula, but is there water enough for us to run in under the lee of the island?"

"Plenty of water."

"Can you pilot the schooner in?"

"Heap good."

"Then do so, and we will see just what that sloop is."

"Stand by all, to lower sail and let fall the anchor!"

The men sprung to their posts and the Indian let the bows fall off sharp for several points and then held the schooner steady for awhile.

"There looms up the island, and it appears only a huge rock," said Lieutenant Sutro.

"Officer speaks straight; it rock, shape like new moon, and there we anchor," and the Pilot kept his eyes ahead as though to seek an entrance between the breakers that were now visible on either side.

A few moments more and the schooner shot into quiet water, while dead ahead was visible a large island of rock, rising some thirty feet out of the sea.

"Let the sails come down with a run, lads!"

"Let fall the anchor!" ordered Mark, and the schooner's headway was checked, just as Lieutenant Sutro cried out:

"Sloop ho!"

"I see her and she has done just what you said she would, Pasquagoula."

"Lower away a boat, Mr. Sutro, and I will board her."

"You will carry a good crew with you, sir?"

"Yes, ten men, though I anticipate no trouble."

"Better haul her skipper, sir, and have him board you, for the wreckers are very treacherous, and that may be one."

"I will do as you suggest, Sutro," and raising his voice, Mark hailed:

"Ho, the sloop!"

"Ahoy, the schooner!" came the response in a clear voice.

"What sloop is that?"

"A trader in distress, having been crippled in the storm some nights ago and bound for Pensacola out of Savannah," came back the reply in the same voice.

"Ay, ay, I'll send a boat aboard and have you report in person."

"Ay, ay, sir," and soon after a boat left the schooner for the sloop, Sutro in charge, for he had urged the young captain to allow him to go.

A few minutes passed away and the boat was seen coming back, and to the surprise of Mark Bonodel, a woman sprung from it to the deck.

"Ah! a lady passenger?" said the youth politely.

"No, Sir Captain, if captain you are, I am the skipper and owner of yonder sloop, and, as you commanded me, and have the power to enforce your orders, I have come on board to report in person."

It was without doubt the owner of the clear voice that had answered his hail. Mark was certain, and it was a woman, tall, slender, clothed in black and deeply veiled.

Raising his hat politely the youth said:

"Lady, I am sorry to have put you to trouble; but I did not expect to see one of your sex in these waters, especially in command of a vessel."

"Circumstances, sir, placed me in charge of the sloop, and a sailor, though a woman, my crew obey me; but my craft was caught in the storm some nights since and dismasted, so I have been making my way, as best I could, under a jury mast."

"You seem to understand these waters?"

"I have a Bahama pilot among my crew," was the somewhat evasive reply.

"Is there any aid that I can render you, lady?"

"Yes, sir; I would ask a more suitable spar for a mast than the one I have."

"You shall have it," and Mark gave the orders to get the spar overboard to tow to the little sloop.

"Thank you, sir; and I am free to go un molested!"

"Assuredly, madam."

The woman made no reply, but bowed and

went over the side into her boat, refusing the offer of the young captain, to allow his men to aid her in rigging the spar.

"Wind come round; better go; this heap bad place with wind north," said the Indian pilot, walking up and joining Mark.

"All right, Pasquagoula, we will get out as soon as the boat returns, for the wind is changing," answered Mark, and half an hour after the schooner was again out in open water, though the little sloop had not heeded his warning and followed him away from the unsafe anchorage.

So rough continued the sea, and as the wind did not abate, Mark Bonodel would not leave the deck during the night; but at dawn was about to retire, when Sutro came to relieve him, when the lieutenant said:

"Captain Bonodel, I am sorry to tell you, sir, that one of the boat's crew last night robb'd a young girl who was on the sloop of this trinket."

"What! did one of my men dare do an act so vile?" angrily exclaimed the youth.

"Yes, sir, and he offered it for sale to the boatswain, who reported it to me and I took it from him."

"It seems there was a young girl on the sloop, and about her neck she wore this chain and locket, which the man robbed her of when they were getting the spar on board," and the officer placed the trinket in the hands of Mark Bonodel.

It was a heavy double-miniature locket, studded upon one side with precious stones, and upon the other were engraved some names and a date.

The chain was massive and of solid gold, and fastened with a clasp, which was broken and tied with a thread, the latter having been cut by the cunning thief.

One glance at it and Mark Bonodel uttered a cry, while his face flushed and paled by turns.

At first he could not utter a word, and then he said, in a hoarse voice:

"Senor Sutro, I know this locket and chain, though I have not seen them for eight long years, and then this chain was about the neck of my little sister, the one I now am seeking the world over to find."

"See, here are the names of my father and mother:

"MARK—LITA.

"MAY 1ST, 17—."

"That was the date of their marriage, and their miniatures are within. See!"

He touched a spring and the locket flew open, revealing skillfully-painted likenesses of a handsome young man and a beautiful maiden.

"My God! I have found my little sister Lita at last; and, Senor Sutro, I forgive and bless the man who stole this locket."

"Ho, lads! to your posts, for back to the island we go, for there awaits me one whom I have sworn to find."

"Ready about!" sung out Senor Sutro, and the schooner was at once put on her course back to the island, where she had parted with the little sloop, Mark Bonodel the while pacing the deck in nervous, anxious expectation, the locket and chain clasped tightly in his hand.

A few hours' run and the island was sighted, but nowhere visible was the little sloop.

It had disappeared, but whether it had sailed away or gone down none could tell; and white as a corpse, Mark Bonodel groaned:

"Found and lost within a few short hours. No, no, no, not lost, for I will find her if I go the world over!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WATER WOLVES.

A SMALL sloop was gliding rapidly through the waters, a few days prior to the scenes related in the foregoing chapters, and though her surroundings were dangerous in the extreme, the man at her helm picked his way through reef, rock and island with a skill and nerve that showed constant exposure to peril.

The sloop was some twenty tons' burden, carried a large sail and jib, and her hull seemed to have been constructed for both speed and carrying capacity.

She stood well up under the pressure of the seven-knot breeze that was blowing, and though the numerous islands, currents and reefs about her rendered the waters rough she kept her decks dry.

There were but three persons visible on board and one of these held the helm.

The latter was a man with a striking face, one that appeared, as it were, a wreck of what

had once been noble, but which a life of crime had indelibly stamped.

He wore a stern, impatient look, and his eyes were almost fierce in their flashes.

Dressed as a seaman, he wore a belt of arms, and seemed like one who would use them upon the slightest provocation.

About him were the perils of sunken rocks, reefs and innumerable islands, for he was cruising in one of the most dangerous localities of the Bahamas; but he seemed to know his way and unhesitatingly pursued it.

Near him, in the door of the companionway leading to the little cabin, sat a woman.

Her appearance was strange, for she was dressed in rich silks, velvets and laces and wore diamond jewelry in profusion.

The rich clothing was soiled by ill-usage, and she seemed to wear it as she would have done a homespun dress, with no care to keep it from destruction.

Her face was still beautiful, though she had reached the medium of life; but, like the man's, it bore the impression of evil which had sullied its loveliness long ago.

She was idly watching the wake of the sloop as it glided along, but the varied expressions flitting over her face showed that her thoughts were busy.

Lying forward, at the little cabin, at full length upon the deck, was the third person upon the sloop.

It was a young man, possessing fine physical proportions, and with a face that was very handsome, though darkly bronzed by exposure.

He was dressed in a fanciful costume, such as a buccaneer might wear, and seemed to be something of a dandy in his attire.

His face was a study, for it had not been trained to hide his feelings, and nearly every thought, good or evil, flitting across it could be plainly read.

"Wambold, I half-fear that we should not have turned back, when almost in sight of our port," suddenly said the woman, addressing the man at the helm.

"You know why I did so; it was on account of Leo's dream."

"I know, and yet I feel that we should have disregarded that, when we had our treasures here on board, and once they were disposed of we could have returned to the island, gotten all else there, and set sail for some port where we could land in safety."

"We can do that as it is, for Leo and the girl can carry the rest of the booty upon the other craft."

"I hope so; but I tell you I don't feel just right about the way things are going of late, and the warnings we have received cause me to be anxious to leave the island, give up our wild life, and settle down to enjoy the riches we have accumulated."

"You have my desire exactly, wife; but I did not wish to go until we had gotten a large fortune."

"And that we have certainly."

"Yes, even if the booty goes at half value; but had we gone on into Havana, after Leo had dreamed he saw me hanged, I am confident that some evil would have befallen us."

"We were not once so superstitious, Wambold."

"No, we were not then wicked, and it is the evil who are the most superstitious," responded the man.

"Well, back to the island we go, load the other craft with booty, and, taking the girl, sail for some American port where we can dispose of our treasure and live in peace; is that it?"

"Yes."

"You do not fear that the girl may betray what we have been?"

"No, for I shall have Leo marry her, and he will soon teach her what she can and cannot talk about, when among other people; but should she be troublesome, why I will simply put my knife in her heart."

"And thus lose the fortune we hope to get by restoring her to her people, for you know that the old man, whom we found on the wreck with her, told you, before he died, that she was the daughter of rich people, sent off for some reason, which he believed was for others to get her fortune?"

"Yes, I remember all; but I would rather lose any fortune she may bring us, than lose my life through her tongue."

"Certainly, Wambold; but now tell me what you think of that little craft which the girl calls the Sea Ghost?"

"I think there is some trick about it, as there is about the Phantom Pirate."

"But how could she run into the basin in our island?"

"That I cannot understand, unless she has some pilot on board who knows the channel."

"But, you, Leo, the girl, and the two pilots on the Phantom Pirate are the only ones who know the channel."

"That is so," said the man thoughtfully.

"You know of no one else?"

"Not one."

"And yet the Ghost Craft came into the basin in a storm!"

"That is true, wife."

"And if it was a human crew on board, how did they know your name and mine, to leave us the warning they did?"

"By Heaven! but I do not know, wife," excitedly said the man.

"I tell you, Alfred, the vessel is a spirit craft, as the girl says, and we must not tarry on that island."

"We have been wicked, oh! so wicked in our lives."

"We wronged one whom you loved, because she loved another, and I hated her because she married the man I had hoped to marry."

"Then, I deserted by the man, you by the woman, we loved each other through the very hatred we felt for them, and we became man and wife."

"From that moment our evil lives began, and Heaven have mercy on us for the sins we have since committed, my first being to poison the woman I hated as my rival, and your's to rob and kill your brother."

"Now, after long years, we find ourselves wreckers, and known as the Water Wolves of the Bahamas, from our cruel deeds."

"We have amassed a fortune, but it is covered with blood."

"We have a haunt we have believed impregnable, and yet it has been invaded at night by a spirit craft, and a warning left that we must die within the year."

"Away from that island, the Death Rock, which has so long been our haven of refuge, I feel that we may live happy lives."

"Happy?" groaned the man, evidently impressed by the woman's rapid retrospection of their guilty past.

"Well, we can live lives of ease, of luxury, and no longer in fear of death at the yard-arm, or by bullet."

"I hope so sincerely, and I promise you, wife, we will depart from Death Rock Island as soon as possible."

"I shall hold you to your promise, Wambold, for I shudder at the thought of returning there even for a night, and, for all our treasure, I would not do what that girl has done."

"Remain alone upon the island?"

"Yes."

"She knows no fear."

"I believe you, for she swings herself over the cliff, on the rope ladder, in the wildest storms, and lights the Death's Head Beacon, when I dare not even look over the edge."

"Yes, she has a cool head, and is a better pilot through the channel than either Leo or myself, for there are times when the storm breaks from the northeast that I would not run the gantlet by day, and yet she did so by night, as you know."

"And a fearful night it was, too; but she is a remarkable girl, and I only hope she will not betray us."

"No fear of her doing so intentionally, for she is true as steel; but having been reared in ignorance of wrong-doing, even when she lights the false beacon, she might, if not watched, sometime betray us without understanding what she was doing."

"Yes, she is as innocent as an infant, and Leo says that she does not know what love is, for, when he told her he loved her, she said she did not have the feeling for him, which she had read in books that those had who loved each other."

"Bah! what does Leo care whether she loves him or not? She shall marry him and that settles it," rudely said the man.

"Sail ho! You must be blind that you don't see her," suddenly called out the young man who was lying forward, springing to his feet.

The man and woman started at his words, and turned their eyes in the direction in which he gazed.

They had almost forgotten where they were, during their earnest conversation, the man mechanically guiding the sloop upon her way.

"She has white topmasts and is a small schooner," cried the man, as he saw the top-hamper of a craft above an island.

"Yes, and such is that spirit craft," said

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Leo, and the young man spoke in a voice that showed dread of the vessel he referred to.

The next moment the strange vessel shot out into full view, around the point of the island, and the woman buried her face in her hands as she groaned:

"It is the Sea Ghost!"

"Ay, ay, it is, and she is in chase of us!" cried the Water Wolf, in a voice full of mental agony.

CHAPTER VI.

CHASED BY THE SEA GHOST.

FOR a moment or two after discovering the strange craft, which the superstitious Water Wolves termed the Sea Ghost, the trio on board the little sloop seemed too unnerved for action, and the man at the helm almost allowed the craft to come to.

But recovering himself quickly, he cried:

"Be ghost or devil at the helm of yonder craft, he has to catch me before I fall his victim."

"Ho, boy, stir yourself, and get up the topsail, and you, wife, quit moaning and lend a hand."

"It is no use, for I feel we are doomed," moaned the woman.

"Bah! don't give up yet, but help us, for I believe we can give yonder craft the slip, and if it be a spirit vessel, you know they hold no power in daylight."

"Ah! that is so," cried the woman, reassured by this argument against ghosts, and she quickly aided the young man to set the topsail and shake out the single reef from the mainsail and jib.

Under her increased canvas the sloop fairly flew along through the rough waters, and it now became evident that if the pursuer was gaining it was very slowly.

The stranger was certainly an odd-looking craft, for her hull and spars were as white as her snowy canvas.

Very little larger than the sloop, she was yet a schooner, and lay deep in the water, or could never have carried the canvas she spread.

Upon her decks were visible but half a dozen people, and five of these were clad in snow-white.

The sixth was at the helm and clothed in deep black.

"By Heavens! it is a woman!" suddenly cried Leo, who was looking at the stranger with a glass.

"What is a woman?" asked the man and woman in the same breath.

"The one at the helm of yonder craft."

"A woman, my son?" gasped the woman.

"Yes."

"Are you sure, boy?" hoarsely asked the man.

"I am!"

"The one in black?"

"Yes, she is clad in black, and wears a veil which floats back on the wind, but does not cover her face."

"Can you see her face?"

"I hardly know; here, father, give me the helm, and see what you make of her face?" and the hand of the young man trembled as he held out the glass.

Grasping it, the Water Wolf placed it to his eye, and after a moment lowered it quickly while through his shut teeth came the words:

"Great God!"

The woman tried to speak and question him, but her words found no utterance; but Leo said huskily:

"You saw what I was afraid to say."

"A skull?"

"Yes, father."

"Even so; the one at the helm is a woman, and her face is fleshless, her head but a skull."

The woman seized the glass nervously, and raised it to her eye with an effort.

Then she too uttered an exclamation of intense alarm, and the spy-glass fell with a crash upon the deck that shattered it, while she sunk down in the companionway and buried her face in her hands.

"Don't give up, father, as mother has done, but run for it to the last, and then, if we cannot escape, face what comes as best we can," said the young man, and his example gave his father new courage, and once more the sloop was held on her way firmly, in her race with a craft that was supposed to be a spirit vessel of the deep.

On through the waters, dangerous unto death, should the helmsman make a single mistake, the little vessel sped, and hot in chase came the white stranger.

The wind steadily increased, and the waters

grew more turbulent; still the pursued and pursuer held on.

The decks were now no longer dry, for wave after wave was taken on board, and the sloop plunged, lurched and quivered under her large spread of canvas; but, not a reef would those on board take in the sails, and she was held mercilessly on.

"Once I can reach the basin, I will get my rifle and see if a bullet will not take effect upon yonder woman," muttered the man, as he glanced back over his shoulder at the sable-clad form that still stood at the helm of the little schooner.

Fiercer and fiercer grew the wind, and higher and higher rose the sea, until the prospect over their course was fearful to behold; but the sloop was not spared, and was kept hard at it, for the schooner was slowly, very slowly, but surely, very surely, gaining.

"Death Rock ho!"

The cry broke from the lips of the young man, who had been anxiously peering ahead for some minutes.

"Thank God!" fervently said the woman.

"At last!" the man responded.

"Yes, the Rock looms up rapidly, and in two hours more we will run into the basin."

"And in two hours more, at the rate she is gaining, the Sea Ghost will be but a mile astern of us."

"Yes, father, but that will give us time to land, get our rifles, gain the cliff and pick every one off of her decks as she runs in after us."

"Bah, boy! don't you know a bullet can do no harm to the dead?"

"Yes, mother; so it is said; but we can try it, and by daylight lead may harm even a ghost, though I doubt if it would by night," answered Leo, filled with the superstitious dread that ruled the age, and which even nowadays, has a firm hold upon many minds, no matter what their education and surroundings.

"We can but try, boy," said the man, and he held on his way, showing a rock here dangerously close, running parallel with a reef there, and rounding an island, with scarcely an oar's length between the sloop and its ragged shores.

"You are taking big chances, father," said the youth.

"I am taking advantage of every chance to gain, Leo, and, if you notice, the schooner does not crowd reefs, rocks or islands as close as I do, and hence we gain on her at times."

"So, I see; but there are ugly rocks hereabout."

"I know them all, boy, for I have run this channel in many a dark night; but I wish to get time enough to go about the straight shoot for the basin."

"Yes, for it would be very dangerous to attempt to jibe in this wind."

"Yes, and I would not jibe unless I was forced to; but see, we are going at a slapping pace, and the Death Rock rises rapidly."

"Yes, and I hope the girl is on the lookout, to bring a boat out to us and get the rifles ready," said the woman.

"Lita will not be asleep, that is certain, mother."

"But she does not expect us back so soon."

"That may be; but the cliff is her favorite place to sit, and I know she will be there," and procuring another spy-glass from the cabin the young man turned it upon the distant rock, which loomed up like a second Gibraltar from the sea.

Here, there, everywhere were rock islands, with a few covered with undergrowth, dwarfed by the fierce winds and salt sea-breezes, and reefs were visible in threatening numbers; but the Death Rock, as the Water Wolves called their island home, loomed up grandly above all, rising with precipitous sides high in air.

Reefs surrounded it, and it had the appearance of an unbroken wall, the base of which was guarded most strongly by breakers, which would render an approach by boat impossible.

That aught else than a sea-bird had found a resting-place upon its summit, no one would believe, to gaze upon it.

And yet, for a long time rumors had gone abroad that a weird beacon had been seen upon its face, luring mariners that beheld it, to run their brave vessels to destruction and death against its merciless sides.

Rumor had it that a beacon, its shape like a human skull of vast size, with lights streaming from the eye-sockets and between the huge teeth, was the Death Lantern that beckoned unfortunate ships to ruin; but no one had ever

been able to solve the mystery of the Death Rock Beacon, and each year another quota of brave vessels were added to its list of victims.

Wreckers there were among the Bahamas with their false beacons, and many of them were often surprised, captured and hanged by war vessels; but the Skull Beacon was situated off the beaten track of cruising craft, and in such dangerous waters that no vessel went there, unless off its course, and no one dared extend the search into the dangerous vicinity, so that superstitious mariners shunned the neighborhood as they would the gates to Purgatory.

And yet, for this Death Rock the little sloop was heading, and swiftly in her wake was rushing the craft that pursued her so relentlessly.

Rumor also had it among mariners, that a schooner, known as the Phantom Pirate haunted these waters, or if seen cruising elsewhere, and chased by vessels-of-war, fled to that weird locality.

Yet, of this Phantom Pirate, the Water Wolves had conversed, as the reader knows, without dread, evidently allied with the secret of its pretended supernatural powers; but the Sea Ghost, a craft which they knew not of, but had seen in their waters, and which had boldly run into their hidden haven and left them a strange and ominous warning, they stood in holy horror of.

It was after this warning, when the Ghost Craft ran in one night, and cast overboard, to drift upon their beach, two coffins, with the names of Wambold and his wife engraved on them, that the Water Wolves had decided to get rid of their booty, so ill-gotten, and fly from their haunt.

Thus it was that they had loaded the sloop with their most precious treasure, and sailed for Havana to dispose of it, but through the dream of Leo, had been alarmed into putting about and returning to the island.

"Well, Leo, we will have to jibe her, for I dare not take the time to go about, as the Sea Ghost is gaining more rapidly now," said the Water Wolf.

"It is dangerous, father."

"It is more dangerous to lose time, so stand by, you and your mother to trim in the sheet, and I will ease her round as best I can."

The course lay around a large rock, and thence to run in to the island, with the wind where it was, it was necessary to turn at a sharp angle and jibe the sails over from starboard to port.

This, in the half gale that was blowing, and especially with so much canvas spread, was a most hazardous undertaking.

But, to have to run up to a spot of open water, go about and thus get her sails to port, would take up a vast deal of precious time, and, if the Ghost Craft jibed would bring her almost alongside for the run into the basin, and hence the Water Wolf made up his mind to his course of action.

"Stand ready all!" he cried as the rock was at hand which the sloop was to round.

"All ready," answered Leo.

"Haul in hard!"

Both mother and son hauled hard on the sheet rope, and bringing his helm up, the Water Wolf brought the bows round, until, with a furious gust the sail was whirled to port, a lurch and a loud report followed, and the mast was snapped in twain, leaving the hull a wreck upon the waters.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

THE crash of the falling mast seemed like the knell of death to the Water Wolves, and they crouched upon the deck beneath the ruins of sails, rigging and spars, almost wholly demoralized.

But the nerve of the old wrecker was quickly recovered, and, seizing an ax he began to clear the wreckage from the craft, while he called out to his son to let fall the anchors to prevent the hull driving upon the reefs.

Leo quickly obeyed, and the sloop was brought up with a sudden jerk, which swept the wreckage from the deck.

Then the two men looked about them, for the woman seemed prostrated, and sat moaning in the companionway.

"There comes the schooner!"

The cry came from Leo.

"Yes, and she has stripped herself of her topsails, flying-jib and foresail," gruffly responded the Water Wolf.

"I did not see her men at work."

Bonodel, the Boy Rover.

"No, for we were too busy looking after ourselves, and my idea is that we are done for."

"Yes, all is lost and we are doomed," groaned the woman.

"Ho, the life-boat!" suddenly fairly shrieked Leo, and his mother sprung to her feet and gazed toward the Death Rock.

"It is the girl!" cried the woman wildly.

"Ay, ay, and she is coming to take us off."

"But can she reach us before the Ghost Yacht, father?"

"That is the question; but let us call to her and bid her pull for her life."

"And ours," chimed in the woman.

Afar off upon the waters was now plainly visible a small surf skiff, and it held but one occupant.

It was in a direct range with the Death Rock, and had evidently come out from some hiding-place beneath its shelter.

In spite of the fierce blow and rough waters, the skiff came steadily on, springing from wave to wave like a thing of life, and impelled by two oars, held in the hands of a young girl.

Scarcely more than sixteen, the daring occupant of the skiff was one upon whom no eye could rest without admiration.

Her form was the perfection of graceful outlines, her movements, even in exerting her strength, willowy and easy, and her face lovely to the extreme of beauty.

Every feature was expressive, her complexion, brown as a berry, was pure, and her teeth milk-white and even, while her lips, a trifle full and pouting were rosy red with perfect health.

Her dress was a strange one, especially for such a scene as she was an actor in, and such a locality.

She wore a tight-fitting bodice of finest black velvet, and a petticoat or skirt of red silk, richly embroidered by some skilled hand.

About her waist was a blue silk sash, and upon her head sat jauntily a cap of the same hue.

All were now drenched with the salt spray, but this she did not seem to mind, as she did not shrink, but merely closed her eyes as the seas broke in showers over her.

Her hands and feet were very small and shapely, and the latter were devoid of covering, for she seemed to ignore shoes and stockings, though she wore in her ears rare jewels, about her neck a necklace of great value, and gems of richness adorned her fingers, which were literally covered with rings.

With a steady, skilled stroke she urged her skiff on its dangerous course, guided by some object on the Death Rock, it was evident, as she never looked behind her, which was of course ahead.

As she neared the wreck she heard voices calling to her, and exerted herself the more; but glancing quickly over her shoulder she did not seem to catch sight of the Sea Ghost, now not very far from the dismasted craft.

The sloop had drifted under the lee of some rocks, before the anchor stopped its way, and now lay in comparatively smooth waters, a circumstance which the coming schooner took advantage of to run down and board, luffing up sharp alongside just as the skiff reached the wreck, and nearly running the latter down.

The cry of the girl showed that she had not before seen the schooner, and, recognizing it as the Sea Ghost, which she had observed from the Death Rock more than once, she sprung on board the wreck and stood by the side of the Water Wolves, to whose aid she had come.

But the crew of the schooner had not been idle, and, demoralized as they were, the Water Wolves were quickly made prisoners.

In dismay they turned their eyes upon the Woman in Black, who appeared before them with a face that was that of a skull.

Her crew, though ghostly-looking in their white clothing, seemed most nearly akin to flesh and blood; but from the woman they shrank in mortal terror, the young girl also imbued with the same dread as she gazed upon the tall form, clad in deep black, and the face of bone.

Addressing Wambold and his wife by name, the Woman in Black told them that their doom would soon follow, and suddenly removing the face of bone, which was a mask, she stood revealed, with her forehead, cheeks, nose, chin and neck disfigured by tattooing.

Then, as they still shrunk in abject fear from her, she made herself known to them as one they had believed dead, one who, the rival of the woman and loved by the man, upon marrying another, had been, as they believed, their victim by poison.

But they had failed in their attempt, and marrying the man she loved, she had sailed for

a far-away land, been wrecked among savages and deserted by her husband, but at last, making her escape, she was now a deformed being, an avowed witch, living only to make others wretched.

Such a confession, from such a source, fell like a death-mantle upon the ears of the Water Wolves, and bowing their heads, they submitted to their fate, whatever that fate might be.

Having already decided what her course should be, the Woman in Black ordered her crew to take the wreck in tow, and soon after the little schooner stood away from the Death Rock, slowly drawing the dismasted sloop after her.

Hardly had the two gotten well under way, when a young man, with a dark, handsome but evil and cunning face, and who now, held the helm, while the Woman in Black stood near, suddenly called out:

"Sail ho!"

All started at the words, for certainly it was not expected to meet a third craft in these waters.

The woman, generally so calm and unmoved, seemed almost dismayed, and, her eyes quickly turned upon the strange sail.

There was no reason for her to ask where it was, for it was not a league distant, and had suddenly come into view, as though bounding up from the sea or dropping from the clouds.

"That craft can come but from one place, my son," she said, after an effort at self-control, and addressing the young man at the wheel, who seemed to stand in the place of a mate on board the little schooner.

"Yes, mother, and where has she come from?"

"The Death Rock."

"Ah! it is not the Phantom Pirate?"

"No."

"Then what other craft could come out from the Death Rock?"

"I am at a loss to know."

"Could she not have rounded the Death Rock?"

"No, not from her present position, or we would have sighted her long ago."

"True, mother; but do you not think she has a familiar look?"

"Yes—ha! it is the yacht Sea Owl, commanded by that accursed boy who was my captive once and escaped me," said the woman savagely.

"Yes, it is the Sea Owl, for I saw her often in New Orleans, and Midshipman Brandt was made her commander and ordered to cruise in the Gulf as a coast-guard."

"If he is in command now, Perdido, we need expect no mercy from him, for he knows me as the Witch of the Chandeleur Isle."

"Yes, mother; but I hope we are mistaken; but the girl will know."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten that; let that girl wrecker come on deck," she added, calling out to one of her crew.

In a few moments the young girl stood before her, calm and fearless.

"Girl, you came from the Death Rock, to rescue Wambold the Water Wolf, his wife and son?"

"Yes," was the quiet reply.

"What schooner is that?" and the woman pointed suddenly to the strange sail.

At sight of her the eyes of the young girl brightened up and she said quickly:

"It is the American cruiser Sea Owl."

"From whence has she come?"

"Out of the Death Rock Basin."

"How came she in there?"

"I ran her in, to prevent her going to pieces in the storm two nights ago."

"Ah! but has she a pilot for these waters on board?"

"I.O."

"Then how did she run out of the channel?"

"I do not know, unless her captain made one of the Phantom Pirates pilot him out."

"The Phantom Pirates?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"In the basin."

"Prisoners?"

"Yes, they ran their schooner in and were captured by the cruiser."

"Indeed! then this solves the mystery of that phantom craft."

"Truly the mysteries of these waters are being brought down to plain reality," said the woman with a sneer; but again she asked:

"And the cruisers' crew know all about the Death's Head Beacon now?"

"Yes, I told them."

"And they did not hold you a prisoner?"

"No."

"And allowed you to come out to the rescue of your fellow Water Wolves?"

"Yes."

"That they might capture and hang them?"

"No, the young captain promised me he would not harm my parents and Leo."

"Those people are not your blood kin, as any one could tell by looking at you."

"No, but I call them my parents and brother."

"Girl, I will be your mother in future, and you will have to forget them, for their doom is sealed, ay, and the doom of all of us shall be, ere I allow yonder cruiser to capture us; but tell me, do you know these waters?"

"Yes."

"This schooner draws five feet, and yonder craft fully nine; can you run us through that reef yonder, where I know there is a passage, and where the cruiser cannot follow?"

"I could."

"Then do so, and I will make you rich, girl."

"I care not to be rich."

"Then you shall be my child, and I will do all I can to make you happy."

"I am happy now."

"But you will pilot us through the reef?"

"No."

"What! you refuse?"

"Yes, for the captain of the cruiser wishes to capture you, or he would not have come in chase, and I will not prevent it."

"Then I will kill you," hissed the woman, half drawing a jewel-hilted knife from her belt.

"Very well," was the cool reply, and the young girl did not flinch.

"By Heaven! do you dare me? You do not know how little my hand hesitates to kill, and that it has stains on it of lives as innocent as yours."

"I do not fear you, and I am not afraid to die."

The Woman in Black gazed upon the young girl with a look that it was hard to fathom.

Then she said softly:

"Girl, I will not take your life, but barter with baser metal for our safety."

"Perdido, bring Wambold the Water Wolf on deck."

In obedience the wrecker, heavily ironed, was brought face to face with the Woman in Black, and he cowed before her piercing eyes.

"Alfred Wambold, I sent for you to ask you a question," the Woman in Black said sternly:

"Well?" was the low reply.

"You have been long in these waters?"

"Yes."

"You know them well?"

"As I know your hated face, woman," was the savage response.

"It is well, I could ask no more; but now tell me if you love life?"

"As you do."

"And are willing to buy it?"

"How?" he asked eagerly.

"I mean not with your gold, for I am confident that your dismasted sloop holds your treasure."

"How then?"

"By work."

"What am I to do?"

"Do you see yonder schooner?"

"Good God! it is a cruiser," cried the wrecker as his eyes fell upon it.

"Yes, and the chances are that her crew will hang you for your crimes; but, as I do not care to be taken too, I offer you a chance of escape."

"Again I ask what am I to do?"

"I wish you to pilot this schooner, with the sloop in tow, through channels which even the daring commander of yonder cruiser fears to follow."

"You appear to know these waters, so why ask my aid?"

"I know the open channels only, but not the secret ones."

"Will you take the helm?"

"On what terms?"

"Your life."

"And my wife's?"

"No."

"Then I refuse."

"Well, I will offer you your wife's life along with yours."

"And my son's life?"

"No."

"I will not stir one hand to aid you unless you pledge yourself to let the three of us go free," said the Water Wolf firmly.

"How about the girl?"

"Ab! I had forgotten her."

"Is she your daughter?"

"Yes."

"I know better."

"She is my adopted daughter, for I found her on a wreck, and have raised her."

"I will tell you what I will do."

"Well?"

"I will spare your life, and the lives of your wife and son, if you will pilot this craft to safety."

"You will set us free?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as I can land you at a near port."

"And allow us to go penniless into the world?"

"You have gold and jewels about, I will swear."

"And you have my sloop, with all my treasure on board."

"Well, I will see that you do not want for riches," and the woman smiled grimly.

"So be it; I will take the helm, so knock off my irons."

This was done, and Wambold the Water Wolf took the helm of the Sea Ghost.

The prospect was anything but inviting about them.

The weather for days past had been unsettled and threatening, and the locality was one to avoid even in a light breeze.

Now night was coming on, the wind was increasing, the sea rising, and there was a dark cloud looming up which indicated a still severer blow, perhaps a hurricane.

Without a perfect knowledge of the sunken reefs, rock isles, and islands, in the darkness it seemed as though it would be impossible to avoid going to destruction.

Then, to make matters worse, the cruiser was coming on apace, and at a rate of speed which would overhaul the little vessel, held back by towing the dismasted sloop, unless the Water Wolf could take a course that the armed craft could not follow him through.

But the wrecker took the helm with seeming confidence, and, after glancing back at the cruiser, and then at the clouds, quietly gave his orders in a way that showed he knew what he was about.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WATER WOLF AND HIS CAPTOR.

"I HOPE you know what you are about, Alfred Wambold," said the Woman in Black, with some anxiety, as she watched the plunging of the schooner, the terrible jerks upon the cables that held the sloop in tow, and the increasing fury of the elements.

Without answering her directly, the Water Wolf said:

"You seem to know the danger of these waters?"

"I do."

"May I ask how you learned them so well?"

"Yes. I found a chart of the main channels, and, as you now know me as I am, I may as well confess that with it was the secret of how to run in and out of the Death Rock Basin."

"I took big chances and tried it, and was successful; but I do not know any of the secret channels by which I could escape yonder cruiser coming on so rapidly."

"You have cause to fear yonder vessel, then?"

"Yes, for her boy commander was once my prisoner."

"Your prisoner?"

"Yes, for, after my escape from an island of savages, whose cruelty left me as you see me, and made me what I am, I was wrecked on an isle of the Gulf and turned the circumstance to my advantage."

"There was wrecked the young commander of yonder cruiser, and I did not treat him in a way that causes him to remember me pleasantly."

"He also believes me to be in league with pirates, a wrecker myself, and so will not hesitate to give me a berth for life in a dungeon."

"You are as bad as I am, if not worse," said the man grimly.

"Worse would not be possible, for when I ran into your island basin I discovered just what you and your wife were."

"I recognized her, as I crept up to your cabin and looked through the window, and I saw her gloating over a skull she held in her hand, and on the bony forehead of which, my name was painted."

"She believed she had poisoned me long ago, when it was another she had killed, and to revel in her joy at the death of her rival, she car-

ried, as she thought, my skull about with her as a souvenir."

The brow of the woman darkened as she spoke, and her eyes glittered, so, to change the subject Wambold the Water Wolf said:

"And your husband deserted you among savages?"

"Yes, me and my boy," she said firmly.

Then she added, as though thinking aloud:

"But he hated me, disfigured as I was by this tattooing, and sought his own way."

"But I tracked him, and after long years I found him."

"Where?"

"In New Orleans."

"Prospering, I'll warrant?"

"Oh, yes, as rich as Croesus, and as wicked as sin."

"But I was avenged upon him, for I visited him in disguise, saw him drink the poison I placed in his glass of wine, and fall at my feet dead."

"Then I fled from the city, and, with my son came to these waters."

"Why?"

"To become a wrecker and gain more gold."

"Could you not get your husband's gold?"

"Not without proof, and, known as I am, as the Tattooed Witch, it would not be well for me to attempt to claim it."

"But your son might?"

"No, he has lived in New Orleans, and is so far guilty, that he would hang if he returned there."

"You were a precious trio," sneered the man.

"Yes, of the same precious kind as Wambold the Water Wolf, his wife and son, now on board this schooner."

The man winced under the reply, and asked:

"Do you still intend to remain a wrecker in these waters?"

"Yes, or rather it will depend upon one thing."

"And what is that?"

"How much treasure your sloop holds."

"Ah!"

"Yes, if it is very valuable, I shall dispose of it, and adding its price to my riches, I will have sufficient to live upon in a foreign land, and in luxury."

"If it does not turn out rich as I hope, I shall continue a wrecker until I have gained all I need."

"You will not rob me of my treasure, gained after long years of hardship and peril?"

"Oh yes I will, for I give you your life, and that is more than you should ask of me."

The man seemed anxious to change the subject, so said:

"We are in particularly dangerous waters now, so have your crew ready to obey my slightest order, and more, yonder storm-cloud will soon burst upon us, and as night is almost here, we are in a bad way."

"And the cruiser?"

"Do you see yonder large rock ahead of it?"

"Yes."

"If it rounds that rock and stands toward us, the man at her helm is a fool, for when we crossed a reef there, we had not two feet under our keel."

"We shall soon see."

"Yes."

The crew were ordered to be in readiness, and the Woman in Black watched the clouds, the sea, her schooner, the towing sloop and the cruiser.

"He has passed the rock you referred to," she suddenly cried.

"Yes."

"And has not put away in chase?"

"No, for the man at her helm knows these waters, it seems: but stand ready all, for there breaks the storm!"

The voice of the Water Wolf rung out loud and thrilling, and the crew sprung to their work with a will, while Lita the girl wrecker, ran to the helm to aid Wambold in the steering of the schooner.

A moment of suspense to all and then the storm broke in fury, and off before the gale the little craft bounded, with just sail enough set to steady her, and dragging the sloop in her wake at a terrific pace.

"Go forward, girl, and direct me!" cried the Water Wolf.

In obedience, the maiden made her way forward, and clambering into the shrouds peered ahead, her bare feet clinging to the ropes as closely as her hands, and her skirt and hair violently whipped by the fierce wind, as fearlessly she directed the Water Wolf at the helm how to steer.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW A PLEDGE WAS KEPT.

"THAT girl understands these waters well, I see," cried the Woman in Black, her mouth close to the ear of the Water Wolf, as he stood at the helm of the schooner.

"Yes, better than I do," was the reply.

"Yet she would not take the helm when I told her to do so."

"No, she cannot be driven."

"I offered her the best of terms."

"She would accept no terms, unless it chimed in with her humor to do so, and she knows not what fear is."

"So I believe— Hark! she is speaking."

In clear tones, sweet as the tones of a bell, came from the girl wrecker in the rigging:

"Hard down your helm to round the Tower Rock!"

"Ay, ay, girl!" hoarsely called back the Water Wolf, obeying, while the men sprung to the halyards.

"We need have no fear now of the cruiser," continued the woman.

"No, we have lost her— What is it, girl?" called out Wambold, raising his voice above the storm.

"Is not this schooner leaking?—for she seems to sail as though water-logged."

"Ay, ay! I'll have the pumps tried, for she does sail heavy."

"Man the pumps!" cried the Woman in Black, and an exclamation from the men, who obeyed, showed that they had made some startling discovery.

"What is it?" called out the woman.

"There is a great deal of water in the hold, and it is running in fast!" sung out Perdido, the son of the Woman in Black.

"She has chipped off something from her keel, doubtless, from some of these accursed sunken rocks," growled the Water Wolf.

"What will you do?" asked the woman.

"Bring her to and anchor her; then work the pumps until daylight, when perhaps we can find some place to beach her."

"Is it so bad as that?" anxiously asked the woman.

"Yes, and perhaps worse."

"How worse?"

"We may not be able to keep her afloat, for she seems to settle fast."

"At the pumps there! Keep them flying, for your lives depend upon it," came in the woman's stern tones.

Then, as if determined to meet the worst coolly, she set about gathering in bundles all things of value on the schooner, to be taken ashore with her.

The crew helped her at this when not working at the pumps, and all was soon in readiness should a hasty leave be necessitated.

The sloop had lost her boat in the storm that had dismasted her, and the schooner's little gig had been swept overboard, so that the life-skiff, in which the girl wrecker had come out from the Death Rock, was the only boat available.

This was lashed to the deck of the schooner, and having come down from her post in the rigging the maiden had quietly taken her seat upon the surf skiff.

"The water is gaining," said the Water Wolf, as he noted that this was the fact.

"Yes," calmly answered the woman.

"We will have to leave the schooner within an hour, if it keeps gaining at this rate."

"Yes."

"And take to the surf skiff."

"Yes, and board your sloop."

"Certainly, for it is all we can do until daylight."

A man had been left on the sloop to steer, and hauling him, the woman asked:

"Is the sloop leaking?"

"No, tight as a drum," came back the reply, and a cheer broke from the crew.

"You will now take the irons off of my wife and son, and allow them to come on deck?" asked Wambold.

"No, I will not; but, on the contrary, I will have the irons put back on you, for with you and the girl free I am not sure of our safety."

"Bah! you have yourself, your son and four men."

"One is on board the sloop, as you know, and you are four, and we but five; the chances are too near even for me to risk anything, so you go back in irons."

"And the girl?"

"Shall remain free."

"Curses!" came from between the shut lips of the Water Wolf; but he dared not resist, and the irons were again put upon him.

Hard at the pumps worked the men, relieving each other as they grew tired, while the storm blew itself out.

But the sea still ran high, and the schooner labored badly, held as she was at the bows by the anchors, and astern by the cables holding the sloop.

Each moment she seemed to settle more, and it became a question whether she would hold up until dawn.

They were all anxious as to this, for if she did not, they must board the sloop in that wild sea, and it was certainly a most dangerous undertaking, and more, the sloop was but a wreck, and a jury-mast must be rigged before she could set sail.

The schooner could be beached, if held up, and her spars used for the sloop, so it was very necessary to keep her afloat, and harder and harder worked all hands at the pumps, the woman and girl aiding with a will.

Thus the time dragged away, and at last the eastern skies grew gray, and soon after rosy under the approach of the sun.

With the first glimmer of light the surf skiff had been launched, and the Water Wolves were taken on board the sloop, along with the packages and bundles which the Woman in Black wished to save.

Next went some of the spars, sails and hamper from the schooner, and last the woman and her crew.

Then the cables were cut and the sloop drifted off, but was soon brought up by letting go the anchors, while, deserted by all, and with the waters rushing into her hold, the pretty schooner gave a lurch, a plunge, and went bows first beneath the sea, not even her topmasts being visible.

"Now to work, men, and rig a jury-mast.

"You, Perdido, look to the work," added the woman, and the crew lost no time in carrying out her instructions.

Late in the afternoon a very fair mast had been rigged, a bowsprit placed, and with the sails, which were canvas from the schooner, the sloop was once more in trim, though of course not what she had once been.

Again placing the Water Wolf at the helm, the woman ordered him to beat back toward one of the main channels among the islands, at the same time asking him:

"Do you know any island in these parts that would be a good resting-place for a few days?"

"Yes."

"Wholly out of the beaten track it must be."

"It is."

"What is its size?"

"Half a score acres, perhaps."

"Is it barren?"

"Nearly so, though there is some undergrowth upon it."

"You know the place well?"

"Yes, I first went there, intending to put a false beacon, but found it was too isolated, for I only saw one vessel pass within the six months we were there, and so I sought another island."

"The Death Rock?"

"Yes."

"How did you find that channel?"

"We were dismasted off the rock, my anchors would not hold, and we were driven by the current into the basin, and thus made it our home."

"Well, you can now head for the island that was your first home in these waters."

"Why do you wish to go there, woman?" suspiciously asked the Water Wolf.

"To overhaul the cargo of this sloop, see just what it is worth, fully rig her for a cruise to the American shores, and to rest."

"Ah!" said the man, and he put the sloop on her way for the island in question.

It was night when he dropped anchor in the little cove, and the woman, who was asleep in the cabin, was at once called on deck by her son, Perdido.

"Is this the island of which you spoke, Wambold?" she quietly asked.

"Yes."

"Then let some of us go on shore, for the sloop is crowded."

"Do you wish me to go?"

"Yes, your wife and son also, and you, Perdido will accompany us."

"There is only my old cabin there, and no bedding."

"We will see to that."

"I should prefer to remain upon the sloop."

"Ashore, I will free you of your irons, but here I will not."

"Then we will go ashore, for these irons cut deep," hoarsely responded the man.

The surf skiff was at once lowered, several bundles, by the woman's directions, thrown into it, and Perdido took the oars.

"Now, Wambold, get in."

The man obeyed.

"And you, woman," and she turned upon the wrecker's wife, who, in her irons, found it difficult to enter the boat, so was aided by two of the crew.

"You next, sir," and she turned toward Leo, who went over the side without reply.

"No, girl, not you, for I wish your company on the sloop," she said as Lita, the girl wrecker, attempted to follow.

The girl stepped back and the woman sprung into the stern and said quickly:

"Cast off!"

Away upon a wave went the surf skiff, and directed by the Water Wolf, Perdido pulled for a safe landing.

"Now get ashore!"

The three prisoners obeyed as best they could, following the woman, who suddenly sprung back into the surf skiff, the act sending it its length away from the shore.

"Here, Wambold, are the keys of your irons, and you can unlock them, and set free wife and son.

"In these bundles are beddings and provisions, and they are my offering.

"The provisions will keep you alive long enough for you to review your past lives of guilt, and ponder over my revenge, and when they are gone you must starve."

"I promised to set you free, and I keep my pledge, as you see, and now bid you a long farewell."

The woman laughed revengefully as she uttered the last words, and then gave an order to her son, who pulled near shore, allowing her to throw the keys and bundles out upon the rocks.

Like statues the three deserted wreckers stood for an instant, and then, while the woman sunk down in a swoon, a bitter imprecation was hurled by the Water Wolf after the retreating boat, and upon reaching the sloop the voice still rung in her ears.

There she was met by the girl wrecker, who, upon hearing the order to set sail and leave the island, and those upon it to their fate, sprung upon her with the fury of a tigress, and but for the timely interposition of Perdido, would have driven a knife to her heart.

"Curse you, girl! I will have your life," hissed the Woman in Black, turning upon her.

"No, mother, leave her to me to tame," said Perdido quietly, and then in a low tone he added:

"You know not these waters where we now are, and our safety depends upon the girl."

"True, boy, I will forget her act," and the woman entered her cabin, but the lamp shone upon her face and showed a look of fiendishness in her eyes that was hardly human.

CHAPTER X.

IN SEARCH OF THE SLOOP.

I MUST now return to the Flagless Cruiser, after the discovery of the flight of the sloop from the little cove in which she had been discovered.

Searching diligently as he could by night, the Boy Captain had continued the search with the dawn, and under the pilotage of the Indian, had cruised about the vicinity during the entire day.

Had the little sloop gone down?

That could hardly be, after she had weathered the storm which had dismasted her, thought Bonodel.

Had the woman told the truth regarding her?

That he had no reason to doubt; but she certainly could not have run toward the American coast through the channel open to her, as she would readily been overtaken by the schooner while coming around at dawn the next morning, for in her crippled state, she had not time to even run hull down in an open sea.

Had she gone the other channel open to her, the Pilot Pasquagoula explained, she would have had to follow in the wake of the schooner, on the course she had taken, and, not having been seen by any one on the Flagless Craft on her return, it was evident that the sloop had not gone in that direction.

It was therefore a settled fact that she had either gone down or boldly put away on a course that led her through a most perilous channel among the islands.

The islands in that direction would have kept her from being sighted from the schooner after

daylight, and upon this surmise Bonodel determined to act.

"Pasquagoula, you know the channels among those islands to the southward, do you not?"

"Me know."

"Do you think the sloop could have gone that way?"

"Schooner can go, so sloop go too."

"Well, we will lay off here until morning, and then cruise among the islands."

"Heap good sense," answered the Indian, calmly lighting his pipe, a liberty which the young captain allowed him even upon the quarter-deck.

To give his men a good rest, Bonodel had the Indian Pilot run the schooner into a safe anchorage and then drop the anchor for the night; but, with the first glimmer of dawn the young captain was on deck, and the schooner got under way.

The Indian took his stand at the wheel, and the vessel went on her way under pressure of a six-knot breeze.

After several hours' run a large island came in sight, looming up like a giant among pygmies, in comparison with the isles upon all sides.

"There bad pale-face live," said Pasquagoula with a nod.

"Ah! you mean wreckers?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Heap sure."

"How do you know, chief?"

"Pasquagoula sail there one time."

"You did?"

The chief nodded.

"How did you go there?"

"In using canoe."

"By yourself?"

"Yes."

"What for, chief?"

"Kill bad pale-face."

"Ah! one of your enemies lived there?"

"Two."

"And you went there in search of them?"

"Went to kill," was the laconic response.

"And did you kill them?"

"Yes."

"Were there other men there?"

"Four more."

"What were they doing there?"

"Light bad lantern."

"A false beacon?"

The Indian nodded.

"How long ago were you there, Pasquagoula?"

"One year last time."

"Well, we will land there now and destroy the false beacon."

"Heap good; hang bad pale-face, give Pasquagoula scalp."

"No. I will break up the gang, destroy their beacon, and deliver the men up to the American authorities."

"Better kill," suggested the Indian, who evidently desired the scalps of the wreckers.

The island, as the schooner drew nearer, appeared to be fertile, though its sides were rugged.

Upon one end however was a point of land which formed a cove, in which the schooner could find anchorage, the Indian said.

The channel led by the north end, where the cliffs rose high and threatening, and near their base were reefs.

There were two passages, and one of them looked open, the other dangerous, though they were just the reverse, Pasquagoula explained.

"And you can run through the right one?"

"Heap good."

"And pilot the schooner into the cove?"

Pasquagoula nodded, and then said quietly:

"Me know heap about rocks; went all round in wing canoe find out all."

"Bad light yonder; wait, when dark come young chief see him."

It was now late in the afternoon, and, determined to see just what the wreckers were about, Bonodel decided to shorten sail a little, so as to arrive in the vicinity of the island after night-fall.

A fresh breeze was blowing, hard enough the young captain knew to send the schooner to pieces, if she struck the sunken rocks.

With some impatience he watched the gathering darkness, while the schooner held on her way, and he kept his glass turned upon the island they were approaching.

There was no human being visible in the range of his glass, or object that looked as though made by the hands of man.

A few stunted trees, some underbrush, a patch of green grass, and otherwise the place seemed barren and deserted.

At last, night settled down, and the Indian said quietly:

"Now look heap good; bad light soon shine." He had hardly uttered the words, when a bright light flashed out over the waters.

It came from the cliff end of the island, and was so placed as to lure a vessel into taking the treacherous channel between the rocks instead of the right one.

"Pasquagoula talk straight," said the Indian Pilot in a tone of triumph.

"You did indeed, chief, and I see you are to be depended upon; but which way will you head now?"

"Fool bad pale-face, and no go on rocks; take good water trail and run into cove."

"That is right, chief, and the schooner is in your hands, so give your orders as you deem right."

"Big wing canoe go all right," was the reply, and then the Pilot asked that more sail might be set to the better work through the channel.

This was quickly done, and the schooner headed directly for the false beacon, which sent its evil eye down upon the treacherous waters from a height of fifty feet.

Nearer and nearer drew the vessel, until the crew grew anxious and gazed toward the Indian Pilot.

But he stood calmly at his post, until the light shone almost down upon the decks; when he suddenly put his helm a-starboard and shot into the other channel.

Just as she did so voices were heard upon the cliff above, though they were instantly hushed, while a stone, evidently loosened by some foot, came bounding from rock to rock to fall with a heavy splash in the waters.

"Bad pale-face heap mad," coolly said Pasquagoula.

"They will be in a worse temper than that, before we are done with them, if you will now run us into that cove, chief," answered Bonodel.

The chief nodded, and the schooner, twenty minutes after, rounded the point and dropped anchor in the little harbor, over which darkness had now fallen, for the false beacon on the cliff had been suddenly extinguished, when it was seen that it had failed to lead the gallant vessel to destruction.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

HAVING ordered two boats' crews in readiness, it took but a short while for the youthful captain to make a landing, his men being well armed, and equipped with lanterns for a thorough search of the island.

What force he might meet Bonodel did not know.

The Indian chief had said four men had been left on the island, after he had avenged himself by killing the two who had been among the band that had destroyed his village and slain his people.

But Captain Bonodel knew that on some of the islands the wreckers had been known to be in large numbers, and to prepare against meeting a large force he had the crew, remaining on board the schooner, ready at the guns to either cover his retreat or fire upon any given point where he might direct.

At the head of twenty good seamen, and with the Indian chief as his guide, Captain Bonodel started to ascend the hill toward the false beacon.

He had not proceeded far when a loud call came from the rocks above:

"Ho, there! who are you?"

"Sea rovers," answered the youth.

"Under what flag do you sail?" asked the voice.

"We have no flag," responded Bonodel.

"Are you pirates?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"Sea rovers."

"Your craft looked American; are you Americans?"

"We own no nationality or flag."

"Do you come as friends?"

"Are you wreckers?"

"Suppose I say yes, what then?"

"Then we are your foes."

"Fire!"

The last word was shouted forth, and a line of fire burst from the top of the hill, followed by sharp reports and a whirring of bullets.

One of the schooner's crew dropped dead, and another uttered a cry, and a bullet cut into his arm; but, without waiting to give his men time to get demoralized, Captain Bonodel called out:

"Follow me, lads, and we'll soon drive these Water Wolves from their lair!"

With a cheer the men dashed up the hill, and though scattering shots were now poured upon them from different rocky cover's, and several fell, the gallant lads gained the top and were confronted by half a dozen desperate men who disputed their way.

But the combat did not last but a few moments, when a cry of quarter was heard, and the victory was won by Mark Bonodel and his men.

"Well, lads, we have cut down half a dozen and taken many more prisoners; but they were in much larger force than the Indian supposed—Ah! Where is the chief?"

The men looked about for him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

Then the lanterns were brought into use and a thorough search instituted, yet without discovering his whereabouts.

If he had been killed his body was nowhere to be found, for the sailors went over their track from the boats up.

The schooner was hailed, but Lieutenant Sutro reported that the chief had not come on board.

What to make of his mysterious disappearance no one knew.

Most anxious regarding him, for he had become deeply attached to the noble red-skin, Mark Bonodel determined to call all of his crew on shore excepting a small guard, and make a thorough search of the island.

This was done, but without finding the missing Indian, and the young captain was compelled to wait until daylight should aid him in the search.

It was a wild-appearing scene that greeted the eyes of the crew when the sun arose and showed them the island and its surroundings.

The channel through which the Indian Pilot had brought the schooner to an anchorage was seen to be a most dangerous one, and the men shuddered as they saw the risks they had run.

In a chasm or canyon several rude huts were visible, built of the wreckage of vessels that had there been lost, and this was the home of the wreckers, who, fifteen in number, had made the island the scene of their cruel deeds.

A few boats lay upon the beach of the cove, but no larger craft was visible, and sending for the leader of the prisoners, who had been taken on board the schooner and put in irons, Mark Bonodel asked:

"How did you get off the island when you had to leave, for you surely did not trust yourselves in those small boats?"

"They are larger than the canoe in which the Indian who was your pilot has cruised through these islands from end to end," was the answer.

"How did you know that we had an Indian pilot?"

"Because there is but one man who could bring a vessel the size of your schooner through that channel."

"And that man is the Indian?"

"Yes."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes; he hung about these waters for a year to kill two of our men."

"And did it?"

"Yes."

"When did you see him last?"

"I saw him last night, after he landed, for I was behind yonder rock when you came ashore."

"And do you know aught of the Indian's whereabouts now?"

"No."

"How many men had you on the island?"

"Seventeen—or I really do not know," said the man, adding the last words quickly, as though he saw that he had made a mistake in telling.

"Mr. Sutro, kindly see how many are accounted for," said Mark.

In a short while the lieutenant returned and said:

"With this man, sir, there are six prisoners and seven dead men."

"Thirteen?"

"Yes, sir."

"That leaves four to be accounted for."

"No, cap'n, I was wrong in my reckonin', for there was but thirteen of us," said the wrecker.

"I do not believe you: come, Mr. Sutro, we will make a complete circuit of the island, and carry this man with us."

This was done, and the search revealed one important fact, and that was a second little harbor on the other end of the island.

Upon the shore was a small boat, and a bun-

dle or two of plunder left in it as though it had been forgotten.

Then there were tracks, evidently made the night before, and a buoy off from the shore held no craft attached.

"Some of your men escaped last night, sir," said Mark, sternly addressing the wrecker.

The man made no reply.

"Answer me, sir!"

"I can talk for terms."

"What do you mean?"

"I want your promise to let me go, if I talk."

"Well, I will give it to you, for you may have valuable information, and one more or less to be hanged among you will not matter."

The man shuddered, and replied:

"Then I'll talk, if you'll say you'll set me free at the first port."

"I'll do so."

"What do you wish to know, cap'n?"

"How many men were on this island?"

"Seventeen, not counting the crew."

"Where are the other four?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"In the smack with the crew."

"You have a smack then?"

"Yes."

"What is her tonnage?"

"About thirty tons."

"And her crew?"

"Five men."

"What use do you make of her?"

"She runs booty to the agents in the different ports."

"When did she depart?"

"Last night."

"Ah! after our arrival?"

"I guess so."

"Tell me the truth."

"She was getting ready about sunset to run out in chase of a craft that went by."

"A craft?"

"Yes, sir, a stranger in these waters."

"Describe her."

"A fair-sized sloop, carrying a jury-mast and newly rigged canvas."

"The sloop I am in search of, by Neptune!" cried Mark Bonodel excitedly, and then turning to the man he continued:

"You give me good news, my man, and I shall not forget you for it."

CHAPTER XII.

AGAIN IN THE SLOOP'S WAKE.

THE young captain of the Flagless Schooner was greatly excited at learning of the fact that the sloop, on which he believed his lost sister to be, was then not very far distant.

If she had passed the evening before, she could not be many leagues away then, and once in her wake, he could soon overhaul her, crippled as she was.

He did not doubt then that the woman had told him a story, and he was the more anxious to overhaul the sloop and rescue his sister, for it could be none other than she who had been the possessor of that locket and chain, which the seaman of the schooner had stolen from her.

"My man, tell me all that you know about the little sloop," he said, as soon as he could command his feelings.

"Of our smack, sir, or the crippled sloop?"

"Well, tell me first of your craft."

"Well, sir, you see we keep her stored with booty, so as to run off with it, if we have to, for now and then an armed cutter, or its boats, come into these waters, and they are not the kind of game we want."

"We sighted the sloop when she was beyond the island, for, it being daylight, the boys was all asleep."

"Then we decided to run the smack after her, to see if she was a rich haul, when we sighted your schooner."

"At first we thought it was a Government vessel, but then concluded it was a pirate, short of men, and looking for lads among the wreckers, so we concluded to pilot her on the rocks by our beacon, and shoot the men as they swam ashore, so as to get the booty on board for ourselves."

"Then the captain and four men, besides the smack's crew, were to wait on board, to sail round and board the schooner when she struck, and the rest of us got on the cliff to shoot 'em from there."

"But you didn't strike, as we expected, and that put us all aback."

"We knew there was but one man, and that one the Injun, that could run a big craft through the channel, for he saved a merchant

brig once, sailing out to her in his canoe from his hiding-place, and running her away from us, and through that pass.

"None of the rest of us could have done it, so we knew the Injun must have run your craft in."

"I ran down to the cove-landing, and I saw the Injun land with you, and I scudded back and reported it to the captain, and then to the boys on the cliff."

"As for the Injun, my idea is that he got separated from you, going up to the cliff, and fell into the hands of the captain and the smack's crew, and you need not expect to see him any more, for he'll die sure."

"I shall follow the smack and punish his murderers, my man; but you think the smack at once sailed, after capturing the chief?"

"I do, sir."

"And whither has she gone?"

"I do not know, sir."

"You can guess at it," significantly said Mark Bonodel.

The man understood him, and responded:

"She might have gone on after the sloop."

"True; but tell me, which way do you think the sloop went?"

"The channels hereabout, cap'n, hain't plentiful, and you couldn't go far wrong in following in her wake."

"That I will do, and, if you wish to make a few hundreds in gold, in addition to your freedom, you can pilot the schooner in chase."

"I'll do the best I can, sir; but pilots in these waters is scarce as hens' teeth, and what piloting I do, must be done by daylight."

"All right, we will weigh anchor as soon as possible."

"Mr. Sutro, get the men together, bury the dead, and take aboard the schooner what booty you can find on the island, while I go up to the cliff and demolish the false beacon and cabins."

These separate orders were carried out, and in a couple of hours more the Flagless Schooner was following in the wake of the sloop, on board which was the daring Woman in Black.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN'S CUNNING.

AFTER her cruel act, of deserting Wambold the Water Wolf, his son and wife, upon the island, the Woman in Black determined to return to the island, which she had made her home, during her stay in the Bahama region.

She was at a loss to reach the island, unless she got back into some channel that was upon her map, or with which she was acquainted.

To do this she must make friends with the girl wrecker, who seemed thoroughly acquainted with the cruising-ground between the islands.

When the Woman in Black—after her flight from New Orleans when she believed she had killed her husband—visited the Bahamas, she selected an island as a good field for operations, and there established herself.

Finding the Water Wolf and his den by accident, she had made up her mind to have the Death Rock as her haunt, after she had punished Wambold and his wife to her heart's content; and to do this, she was content to remain where she had located for the present.

The crew of the schooner that she had chartered to carry her to the Bahamas she won over to her by her liberality to them and her causing them to dread her as a witch with supernatural powers, so she knew she had nothing to fear from them.

The punishment of the Water Wolves had come sooner than she had anticipated, for when they had passed near her island and been sighted by her, she had given chase to their sloop and the storm had done the rest.

Feeling her way about, after leaving the Water Wolves to perish, she had suddenly sighted the Flagless Cruiser, and at once ran into the little cove, where the reader has seen the Indian Pilot guided the schooner after her.

As soon as the Flagless Schooner departed, the woman determined to fly from that locality, fearing to be seen by Mark Bonodel by day, for in him she recognized the youth who had been the confidential clerk of the money-lender, her husband.

She knew that the youth had been suspected of killing the money-lender, and what he was doing in command of a schooner she could not understand; but she feared him, and she was anxious to get out of his presence, and afterward to give his vessel a wide berth.

To do this she wished to go among the islands, for he might follow her if she remained in open water, and her only stand-by was the girl wrecker.

Since the desertion of the Water Wolves and the attack upon her by the girl, the woman had been a little shy of the beautiful wrecker, who was so ready to avenge a wrong done those she deemed her friends.

Now she went to the cabin, and calling to the girl, said:

"Lita, I fear you do not look upon me as your friend."

"You left my only friends to perish on that island, and I hate you!" was the frank admission.

"My child, listen to me, for I wish to put the matter in its right light before you, and prove to you that I am acting for your good."

"These people, the Water Wolves, whom you believe to be your friends, are your worst foes."

"They are outlaws, and came to these islands to war against the vessels of all nations, that they might enrich themselves out of the ruin of others."

"That I now know, for the captain of the armed yacht told me so," said Lita.

"Well, you know that they killed to get gold, and made you, innocent of doing any wrong yourself, the instrument of much harm to others."

"Yes, I feel that," and the young girl's lips quivered while she added:

"I have felt so sorry for the poor people who went to their death in the sea below the Skull Beacon, but they told me they were our enemies, that all people who sailed in ships, except the Phantom Pirate, were our bitter foes, and that it was right that we should kill them."

"They grossly deceived you, my sweet girl, and I am now your friend, for I know that they have done you much harm, and meant to do you more."

"These people once sought to kill me, in far-away England, and believed that they had done so."

"You have seen the skull that the woman kept in the cabin?"

"Yes."

"My name is painted upon its forehead, and they believed that it was my skull."

"But I have lived to avenge myself against them, and I will live to right the wrong they have done you."

"If I took them to a seaport, or turned them over to a Government vessel, they would be at once strung up for their crimes; but I allow them a more merciful death."

"But now tell me, do you know when you first came to them?"

"It was long ago, when I was a little girl."

"You remember it?"

"I remember being on board a vessel, and a rough man had charge of me; then a storm came and we struck at night."

"I do not recall much more, for since then I have been with the people on the island."

"You know your name?"

"Lita."

"What is your other name?"

"I do not know."

"Do you remember your parents?"

"I remember those I suppose were my parents, for I have here a locket with pictures in it, which I think are likenesses of my real father and mother, for it seems to me, I saw them other than in these little paintings—Oh! where is my locket?"

The young girl turned pale, as her hands grasped excitedly about her neck.

"Did you have it about your neck?"

"Yes, the locket hung by a gold chain around my neck, and I wore it almost all the time."

"The clasp was broken off the chain, and I tied it with a thread, and I must have lost it."

"Oh! if it is lost bad luck will come to me, won't it?"

"No, for we must try and find it."

"When did you have it last?"

"It seems I had it after we left the island; but then I can hardly remember, for so much has happened."

"I had a place on the island I kept it, and it may be there, though I thought I had it around my neck."

"And you prize it most highly?"

"More than all else I have, and I have lots of jewelry and pretty things that used to belong to dead folks," said the girl, innocently.

The woman saw her chance, and her eyes sparkled.

Then she said:

"Well, Lita, as I said I would be your friend, I will prove it by returning to the Death Rock, to get your locket."

"I am in a hurry to go elsewhere, but I will go there for you, and then I will try and find

your parents for you and restore you to their keeping."

"Now, suppose you take the helm, as I would not like any accident to occur, and you know these waters better than I do."

"And head for the Death Rock?"

"Yes."

"I will, for I wish to find my locket," and caught in the snare of the cunning woman, the girl wrecker went on deck and took the helm, taking a course, at the woman's direction, that would prevent them from again meeting the Flagless Schooner.

Thus it was that the little sloop passed the Wreckers' Island, not knowing that it was inhabited, on her way back to the den of the Water Wolves of the Death Rock.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WRECKER'S THREAT.

I WILL now explain the mysterious disappearance of the Indian Pilot, after the landing of the crew of the Flagless Schooner, to charge the wreckers on the cliff.

He had, as they moved off up the hill, been struck by the first volley, a bullet grazing his temple.

The shock had temporarily stunned him, though the wound was a very slight one, and he had fallen to the ground, unnoticed in the excitement of the charge.

Soon recovering consciousness, he arose to his feet and looked about him.

He was still slightly dazed, and shaky upon his feet, and seeing a party of men coming toward him down the hill, thought they were the schooner's crew, and walked into their midst.

Too late he discovered his mistake, for he was knocked down, and having been quickly bound, was dragged rapidly away toward the other end of the island.

It was here that the wrecker's smack lay at anchor, and the Indian was hustled into a boat, along with bundles of booty, and rowed out to the little craft.

The anchor was quickly raised, sail set, and the smack stood off with all haste.

Thrown into the cabin Pasquagoula was left there until daybreak, and then a man entered and stood gazing upon him.

He was the captain of the smack and the leader of the Island Wreckers.

His character can best be judged by the fact, that when he saw that the island was attacked, without aiding his men on the cliff, he had fled with his boat's crew and made his escape.

A tall man, with a heavily bearded, wicked face, his eyes glittered viciously as he gazed down upon the bound Indian.

"Ho, Injun, I know you," he said with a hoarse laugh.

"Yes, Pasquagoula know bad white man too," was the calm reply.

"You were my prisoner once."

"Yes, but got away."

"You did indeed, and killed my brother who was guarding you."

"Brother bad man; got his scalp."

"And I'll have yours for it; but not now, for I have work for you to do."

"Chief no work; hunt fish, kill bad pale face, sail wing-canoe, but no work."

"You shall do what I wish, or you will lose your scalp."

"Pasquagoula die like big brave."

"Well, we shall see; but I consider that I got a big prize in you, Injun, and I intend to make the most of it."

Pasquagoula simply nodded, and the wrecker captain went on:

"You know, so the men say, where there is a treasure buried upon one of the Bahama Islands?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you will guide me to that treasure, I will spare your life, and give you all the gold you care for."

"Have plenty gold now."

"Well, if you don't pilot me there, I shall scalp you alive, and then let you die chained down to the ground upon some island where the vultures can feed upon you."

The Indian did not flinch at this terrible threat, but said simply:

"Pale-face bad as red-skin, when he have enemy."

"I'll be worse, red-skin, as you shall know."

"Now you have your choice—to pilot me to that island, where the treasure of some pirate is hidden, and which I am aware that you know of, or to die as I have said."

Pasquagoula was as cunning as he was brave.

He knew that the wrecker captain meant just what he said, and furthermore, he did not care to die if he could avoid it.

So he said, blandly:

"Injun no fool—don't want die, don't want lose scalp; but, if have to die, will not be coward dog."

"Injun have plenty gold, so don't want more; but he tell secret of gold island to bad pale-face for save his life."

"No, I do not wish you to tell me the secret, but to take me to the island."

"When I have found the gold you shall have your life spared, and as much of the money as you wish."

"Very well; bad white man have his way."

"Pasquagoula do as he tell him."

"You are a level-headed red-skin, and I'll make you rich; now I'll unchain your feet, and let you

come on deck, but I must keep your hands in irons, for if you jumped overboard when near the islands, three boats could never catch you, for men say you can swim like a fish."

"Swim heap good; but Pasquagoula no fool."

"You are right, Injun, and you'll not regret befriending me."

"But don't tell any of my men about the treasure island, for that must be a secret between us."

"Me keep still tongue," was the reply, and the Indian chief was freed of the chains about his ankles, but upon either wrist was an iron cuff, with a chain two feet in length connecting them.

The men looked a little surprised at seeing the chief come on deck with their skipper, but the latter told them that he had bribed the red-skin to serve as a pilot, yet considered it best to keep him bound for a while.

"Yes, but can't we make the blasted red nigger tell us where that pirate ship was wrecked, which he was pilot on, and where the captain buried the treasure? for he and the Injun was the only ones that lived, and they say as how the buccaneer chief was caught and hanged soon after, so that yaller-skin that knows what it is."

This was said by an old sailor, who, with others of the wreckers, had heard the story of the Indian's knowledge of the secret island, where a buccaneer's vast treasure in gold and gems had been buried.

"He says the wrecked craft had no booty on board, for I asked him about it," said the captain anxiously.

"Yes, but I know messmates as heard the red nigger say he knowned whar the treasure was hid-den," persisted the man.

"I know he said so, for he admits it; but he said so to save his own life, he tells me, and I have promised him good pay to act as our pilot, for there is no man that knows the Bahamas better than he does."

"That is so, cap'n, and if we keeps him chained, we kin hold him; but if not, he'll leave us afore twenty-four hours, for he is more slippery than a greased eel, and a sea sarpint for cunning, while he has the nerve of a shark."

"I believe you, Tom, and I will keep my eyes on him; but now let us see if we can overhaul that sloop, for I feel as though it might turn out a rich prize."

The Indian was consulted, as to which course the sloop, in her crippled condition, would be the most likely to take, and the smack was put away in chase, Pasquagoula being given the freedom of the little vessel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE INDIAN PILOT'S REVENGE.

BEATING through the channels, leading among the Bahamas, was slow work, and it was not until dawn the next day that the sloop was sighted from the wrecker's smack.

"She is heading for the neighborhood of the Death Rock," said the wrecker captain.

"Yes, cap'n, and it hain't a neighborhood I likes," remarked a seaman.

"Nor me," said another.

"It is where the Phantom Pirate cruises most," chimed in another.

Then a fourth remarked:

"The Death Rock is where the Skull Beacon is often seen."

"Well, if the sloop can stand it, we can, and, as I am in chase of her, we will hold on until we capture her," said the skipper.

"Suppose we sees the Phantom Pirate, cap'n?"

"Well, it will be as bad for the sloop as for us."

"We may catch a sight of the Skull Beacon, and they do say that those as sees it onst, is bound to be lost."

"We cannot see the Beacon by daylight, and before night we will be far on our way from the Death Rock," remarked the captain reassuringly.

"You are right there, cap'n, and I for one, would like to know just what that craft ahead is, and what cargo she carries."

"We are gaining upon her."

"So we are; is there no way, Injun, that we can cut across and catch her, for it looks like open water yonder?" and the wrecker captain pointed to where the sea seemed clear of reefs.

"No want wreck boat, do he?"

"No."

"Let Injun go right way."

"All right, red-skin, you are the doctor; only I would like to overhaul yonder craft before it gets too near the Death Rock, which I confess I wish to give a wide berth."

"Death Rock bad place," said Pasquagoula quietly.

"Have you ever been there, Injun?"

"Injun been there three time."

"Ah! did you ever see the Skull Beacon?"

"Three time."

"And yet you live?"

"Yes, Injun still live," and at his words the superstitious crew gathered around him, anxious to have him say more.

To lead him on the wrecker captain asked:

"Did you ever see the Phantom Pirate?"

"Three time."

"How was it, Injun?"

"See Phantom Pirate cruising in these waters."

"At night of course?"

"Yes."

"And the Death's Head Beacon?"

"See him at night too."

"How did you get on the island?"

"Go in wing canoe."

"Was anybody living there?"

"Dead folks," was the quiet response, and his

hearers started at the thought that *dead folks* were living on the Death Rock.

"Their spirits you mean were there, red-skin?"

"Yes, heap spirit, heap look bad; spirit of bad pale-face."

"You saw them there?"

"Yes."

"Did they see you?"

"Injun hide, spirit no see him."

"Did you stay long on the island?"

"Little time."

"Now tell us, do we follow the sloop yonder, for it seems to be going right for the island?"

"Yes, we go too."

"Do you think it will run into the island harbor, if there is one?"

"Yes."

"And what will we do?"

"Go too."

"But it is almost dark now, and—"

"Injun know the way at night."

"Well, we will go where the sloop can, and if we find the spirits too much for us, I guess we can run out again, so go ahead as you please, Injun," said the wrecker captain.

It was now sunset, and the Death Rock was yet two leagues away.

The crippled sloop was a little over a league distant, and heading directly for the Death Rock, as though intending to make a run into the little basin.

That they had sighted the smack in ch se was evident, for the sloop was making every effort it could, in its crippled condition to gain on the pursuer, and endeavor to be far enough ahead when darkness came on, to throw her off her wake.

But the smack was pushing on too, and gaining, and if the Indian Pilot could run into the Death Rock Basin after the sloop, the wreckers had no fear that it would escape them.

It was a dangerous locality for the wreckers to find themselves in; but their greed for gold forced them to take all risks.

They knew well that few vessels ever passed through that locality in safety, and that they were liable to see the Phantom Pirate, which to see was said to be death.

Also, not seeing the Phantom Pirate, they might come under the glare of the Skull Beacon, which was said to lure those seeing it to destruction.

But the Indian confessed to having seen the Phantom Pirate and Skull Beacon several times, and also to having landed upon the Death Rock itself, and there behold spirits, and yet he still lived unharmed.

If an Indian could stand it, they could.

If the sloop could run in they could.

So they thought and decided.

The wind was fresh, but not blowing very hard, though the sea was quite rough from some cause.

Still the sloop with her jury-mast held on, and was well managed, and they knew that few stancher crafts were afloat than was their little smack.

When darkness settled around them, their hearts beat warmly.

Then the sloop was lost to sight, and they knew that it was almost under the shadow of the Death Rock.

Had it intended to round the island, the Indian Pilot told them, it would have had to lay its course from about where they then were, as, from either side of the huge rock, a reef put out, forming a perfect V, with the small end as the entrance to the basin, and the outer ends fully a league apart.

It may have been imagination, but the wreckers seemed to feel that the winds arose and howled most mournfully through the rigging, while the seas certainly appeared to rise higher, and several times a wave boarded the smack.

The Indian Pilot stood calmly at his post, his feet had been freed of the irons, but his wrists were encircled by handcuffs, and a chain, several feet in length connected them, so as to give him the use of his arms in managing the helm.

His eyes were kept upon the dark rock rising ahead of them out of the sea, and he was now silent and stern looking.

"You don't think we had better put back, Injun, do you?" asked the wrecker captain in a whisper.

"No put back now; in current of Death Rock, and must go."

"Good God! do you mean the smack could not put back now?" cried the skipper, in alarm.

"Pasquagoula speak straight," was the calm response.

"Then we have to go on?"

"Yes."

"And the sloop?"

"In the rock basin now."

"And we can go in?"

"We go."

"For Heaven's sake be careful, for I see rocks rising here and there about us, and there are breakers roaring upon both bows."

"Yes, tight place," was the not very assuring remark of the Indian pilot.

"And if we strike?"

"Go down."

"And die?"

"Yes, die heap quick here," was the painfully laconic reply.

"My God! I wish we had not come."

"Pasquagoula glad we come."

"Why so?"

"I-eap gold yonder in island."

"Ha! that then is the island you know of, where the pirate treasure is buried?" eagerly cried the wrecker captain.

"You wait, see soon."

"But you cannot see to run in, for it is dark, and seems to grow blacker each moment."

"Plenty light soon."

"What! do you mean the Skull Beacon will be seen?"

"May be; see heap soon."

A cry broke from the crew as he uttered the last words, for suddenly there streamed out over the dark waters a lurid glare.

It came from far up upon the Death Rock, and as soon as the eyes of the wreckers caught the glare they beheld two rays of light, then a halo below them, and the *Skull Beacon* was in full view!

"We are doomed, I fear," said the wrecker captain, turning toward the Indian, who answered in his calm way:

"Skull Beacon give good light to steer by; but current swift, wind blow bad; must set all sail to run in."

Quickly the order to set all sail was obeyed, and the smack went bowling along at a twelve-knot pace, wind and current both driving her on.

Before her loomed the threatening Death Rock, upon either side breakers roared savagely, no opening was visible to the eyes of the wreckers, and the *Skull Beacon* sent down its ghastly light, which caused the men to cower with superstitious dread beneath its baleful rays.

Suddenly, under the bows of the smack appeared a breaker, and the wrecker captain shouted, as he rushed for the wheel:

"Hard! hard down your helm!"

A wild war-whoop broke from the lips of the Indian Pilot in response, and turning, he bounded over the taffrail into the sea, while the horrified crew stood transfixed.

But only an instant of suspense, and then the smack was in the foaming caldron, turned hither and thither, and then hurled upon the rocks with a force that shattered her helm almost to atoms, wrought her mast and sails to the deck, and the sea following in her wake swept her from stern to bow, carrying upon its bosom the ill-fated crew, who now well knew in that awful moment that they had been the victims of the Indian Pilot's revenge, who had sacrificed his own life to destroy theirs.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

AFTER the Woman in Black ha' cunningly gotten Lita the girl wrecker to act as a pilot, the sloop was headed, as the reader will remember, for the Death Rock, where the maiden hoped to find her locket.

That she would not do so, is already known, for it had been cleverly stolen from her by one of the crew of the *Flagless Cruiser*.

That she had not before missed it, was owing to the fact that she frequently went without it, and also, the excitement of the scenes through which she had lately been passing had driven all else from her mind.

The Water Wolf, his wife and son she had never really loved.

From the first there had been an invisible barrier between them, which the maiden could not account for, but which was the barrier between sin and innocence.

They had treated her kindly, after a fashion, but she had never been petted, received a kiss, or a loving word from either the man or his wife, and from Leo the love he had offered had been as matter-of-fact as though it was a business transaction.

The girl had thus grown up to the thres' old of womanhood, unloved and unloving.

The island, the sea, the skies, the storms, her boat and pets she did love, but not the people.

When, one night of storm, she was alone on the island, and had seen the American cruiser *Sea Owl* lying off the island, and had gone out in her surf skiff and piloted it into the secret basin, she first became aware of the crimes the Water Wolves were committing.

The young commander of the *Sea Owl* had told her of the outer world, which she had known only through the books she had read, and which came off of the wrecks.

The woman she called by the sacred name of mother had taught her to read and write, and

it had infuriated Lita to such an extent, that under the impulse of the moment she had sought to avenge them.

As they sailed toward the Death Rock, the hurried words of the strange woman quite soon won over the young girl to liking her, while Perdido, struck by her marvelous beauty had become deeply interested in her, especially when his mother told him that she believed the girl wrecker to be the child of rich parents, or an heiress, whose fortune could be gained by restoring her to her real kindred.

Having cruised alone through the islands, and also often with the Water Wolves, the girl wrecker had become an expert pilot, and won the admiration of all on board the sloop by the skillful manner in which she ran the little craft through all dangers.

Constantly at the helm, for it was her wish to be there, Lita seemed buried in deep thought all the time, though not so much so as to cause her to forget her work, or the peril surrounding them, should she go wrong.

She made up her mind that she would go back, if alone, and rescue the Water Wolves from their fate.

She would set them free and let them go their way, and then return to the woman who had promised to find her parents for her.

This was what Lita was brooding over in the run to the Death Rock.

When, glancing astern, she sighted the smack in pursuit, she sung out in her clear, bell-like voice:

"Sail ho!"

For a moment there was considerable consternation aboard, and the Woman in Black seemed almost unnerved, for failure seemed imminent upon the very heels of succor.

The smack, on account of her tall mast, had been seen by Lita before the sloop had been discovered, and it was hoped that some way to dodge the pursuer could be found.

But the girl wrecker asserted that the only chance was to run for the Death Rock Basin, and every effort was made to force the little craft along.

At last darkness came on and the channel between the reefs was reached.

But, with a steady hand and cool mien the girl wrecker guided the sloop upon her way.

Into the channel she was held unswervingly, and through the caldron of waters she passed that raged between the two ends of the reef.

Then the passage between the rocky walls of the island were unerringly reached and the smack, a few minutes after, ran into the little basin.

An exclamation of fear broke from the lips of the crew, as a large schooner was seen lying at anchor in the basin, and they believed that they had run into a trap.

But the girl wrecker quickly explained that it was the schooner, known as the Phantom Pirate, which the Sea Owl had captured, some ten nights before when it ran into the secret basin.

"Schooner ahoy!" hailed the Woman in Black, in a loud, hoarse voice.

No answer came.

"Ahoy the schooner!" she repeated.

Still no response.

"Phantom Pirate ahoy!"

No reply.

"I will board the schooner in my surf skiff," said Lita.

"And I will accompany you, and you also, Perdido," the woman remarked.

The surf skiff was at once put into the sea, and the three entered it, the girl wrecker taking the oars.

Across the basin she rowed, and running alongside the schooner the three clambered on board.

A sickening breeze fanned their faces as they reached the deck, and lighting a lamp she had brought with her, Lita moved toward the cabin, followed by the mother and son.

Into the cabin they went, but it was deserted.

Then they went forward, between-decks, and the sight that met their gaze appalled them.

There, in lines, upon either side, ironed hands and feet, and chained to the decks, were more than a score of men.

They were dressed in deep black, and they were in all manner of positions, just as they had been when the breath had left their bodies, *for they were all dead*.

The shock was a fearful one to the three who held them, and they shrunk back in dismay.

"The Sea Owl ran out and could not get back, so they were left to die, for no succor could reach them," said Lita, after awhile.

This was the solution of the startling discovery, and accepting it, the Woman in Black at once thought of their danger from the pursuing smack, so she cried:

"Well, they were cruel pirates and they deserved their fate."

"But let us look to our safety, my child, and frighten off the craft that was in our wake."

"She cannot come in without a pilot."

"But has she not a pilot to come thus far in safety?"

"It would seem so; but what can we do?"

"You can light the Skull Beacon to frighten them."

"Yes, I can do that," and away hurried the young girl, followed by the others.

Reaching the shore of the basin, she led the way to the cliff, and, ascending to the summit by a rope-ladder, she walked fearlessly along until she came to the outer sea-wall.

The others had followed her, but not with the easy gait which seemed natural to her in spite of the danger.

Reaching the cliff overhanging the sea, she said:

"If you have any fear, remain here, for this is a dangerous way to go."

They waited, watching her as she swung herself over on a frail-looking rope-ladder.

Rapidly she descended some thirty or forty feet to a rocky shelf, upon which stood the skillfully-constructed Skull Beacon, which served as a false light.

Lighting it, she rolled open a canvas curtain that concealed it from the sea, and immediately its baleful glare went out over the waters.

Below, and not far distant, was visible the little smack, rushing on to destruction.

A moment more and the wild war-cry of triumph of the Indian Pilot was heard, and the craft was dashed to destruction, its crew to death.

Putting out the lantern the maiden ascended to the cliff's top, and found the woman and her son rejoicing over the scene of death they had witnessed.

"I would not have lighted it, had I not thought they would have put about, which in this wind they could have done, for I am sick of seeing people die," she said sadly.

"They were our foes, girl, and would have killed us."

"But come, let us return to the sloop, or those coward fellows of ours will kill themselves through fear."

"To-morrow I will leave you here, while I go to the nearest port to refit the sloop, and upon my return we will start for America to look up your kindred, my child," and the woman led the way back to the sloop, rejoicing greatly at the death of her foes.

CHAPTER XVII.

FUGITIVES FROM HUMAN KIND.

THE girl wrecker could not exactly understand why she should be left alone upon the Death Rock, while the woman sailed for the nearest port to have the sloop refitted, or purchase another and better craft.

But the Woman in Black argued well, that she did not wish to have the girl go with her, when she could remain on the island and get all the booty ready to take with them upon her return.

In the neighborhood of the Death Rock the woman knew her cruising-ground, and she therefore did not need the girl as a pilot.

Her intention was to depart in the sloop for San Augustine, where she knew she could find a buyer for her booty.

Then, in a better craft, she would return and remain on the Death Rock, lighting the Skull Beacon, and causing other vessels to run upon the reef, that she might add to her riches.

As to the girl, she intended to set inquiries afoot when in San Augustine, to ascertain if possible who she was, and then to trade off the secret of her recovery, if she found her to be the child of rich parents.

But, of course, Lita would have to remain on the island to await the movements of the woman.

The locket and chain, when searched for, could not of course be found, so that was a source of great distress to the young girl, and the woman regretted it, as she might with them the more easily find out what she wished to know of her parentage.

Sailing away from the Death Rock, the Woman in Black left the girl wrecker once more alone upon the island.

But the dead pirates had been thrown into the sea, and Lita was not in the least alarmed at having to stay alone, and coolly watched the departure of the sloop from the cliff.

The winds favored the little sloop, and a good run was made to San Augustine, and the anchor was dropped without any accident or adventure to mar the voyage.

Through Perdido, her son, who was one time the clerk of the money-lender in New Orleans, whom he afterward knew to be his own father, an agent was found in San Augustine, who was more than willing to take the rich booty off of the hands of the wreckers.

Secretly, by night, the sloop was unloaded, the cargo being carried to the agent's in the town, and the woman, in a disguise, went up to receive her gold, after which she intended to purchase a small and trim schooner then in the harbor, and return to the Death Rock.

As she walked along the street she suddenly came face to face with a padrone, who was standing in the broad glare of a shop window, gazing upon the display of trinkets within.

Back against a tree the woman staggered, and would have fallen, in spite of its support, had not the padrone sprung forward and caught her.

His touch seemed to quickly revive her, and she cried, as she drew herself from him:

"Rudolph Ramon, you alive?"

"Great God! you are—"

"Your wife."

The man seemed as much moved as the woman, when she drew back her veil and revealed her tattooed face.

"Yes, I am your wife, whom you deserted on that island among savages."

"I thought that I had killed you and gained my revenge, and now I find you alive, and in the garb of a priest."

"Woman," and the man's voice was deep, his manner impressive, as he spoke:

"Woman, I have sinned most deeply, how deeply, Heaven only knows."

"I have sinned against you, against my son, my fellow-man and my God."

"Your act, when you believed that you had

poisoned me, brought me to a full realization of my crimes, and, repenting, I gave my wealth to the church, I cast off the world, and in this garb, as an humble priest, I now seek to atone for the past.

"If you hold ill-will toward me now, take your dagger and drive it to my heart."

She shrunk back before his look and manner.

She was, with all her sins, imbued with an awe of religion, and she dared not raise hand against him in the garb that he wore, although her grasp was upon the hilt of a stiletto.

"No! no! I am avenged in seeing you thus-farewell!" she cried in a husky voice, and turning, she fled from him in seeming terror.

It was some time before she could summon up courage to go on to the agent, who had sold her booty for her, and upon receiving the money from him she sought the shore, where her boat was in readiness awaiting her.

Perdido, her son, was there and said:

"I have bought a little vessel lying down the harbor, and have left our craft at anchor where she was."

"But we must sell her, for she is worth several hundreds at least," said the woman, her greed of gold gaining ascendancy once more.

"No, for we must hasten at once out of this harbor," and the young wrecker seemed greatly excited.

"What is it, boy, for you have something to tell?" said the woman, noticing his manner.

"It is that which will cause us to get away from this port as soon as possible."

"Speak out, boy!" cried the woman, nervously.

"Well, as I told you I would, I went rowing among the vessels in the harbor to see if I could find one suited to us."

"I found a little schooner, and told her skipper I would take her at a certain price; but he wanted more, and I left him."

"As I rowed away, I saw a schooner running in."

"A schooner?"

"Yes; and it was the same craft that spoke us that night, and which you went on board of."

"The one commanded by that boy, Bonodel?" and the woman became greatly excited.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I rowed up to where she dropped anchor—you see her lying yonder—and a boat put ashore from her."

"In that boat, besides the oarsmen, were five persons."

"Who were they, Perdido?" and the woman's voice trembled.

The young wrecker leaned forward and whispered something in her ear.

The woman started back, uttered a cry, and then said, in quivering tones:

"Come, boy, this is no place for you and me."

"Come! we must fly with all haste, for that boy knows us well; and those people, you tell me were with him, know us."

"We must away would we save our lives, would we keep our necks out of the hangman's grasp. We are henceforth fugitives from humankind, and must bury ourselves far from here upon some island where no one can find us."

"Come, let us get that schooner at any price."

"I did go back and buy her, after making the discovery I did, and our traps are all on board and the sloop deserted."

They sprung into the boat and pulled for the schooner.

It was a small craft of fifteen tons, and looked like a stanch sea-boat.

But to their surprise, they were not hailed as they approached, and upon boarding they found no one there.

"Great Heaven! where are the crew?" cried Perdido.

"They have deserted us, boy, so we must go alone."

"Ay, and robbed us, for our chest is gone!" said Perdido, darting into the cabin.

"Curses upon them! But let them go with their stolen gold, for I have more."

"Up with that anchor, boy, and we will sail alone to some spot where we can forever hide from human kind."

Soon the anchor was up, the sails set, and, with the Woman in Black the little craft sailed away in the darkness of night, her crew of two persons flying from justice and only anxious to find a haven where they could hide themselves from the sight of man.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PADRE PLOTS MISCHIEF.

THE man, whom the Woman in Black had so unexpectedly met, and in a garb of a priest, was not the repentant being his words had indicated to her.

His heart had grown cold at sight of her, for no woman could have suffered greater wrong than had she at hands of man.

Deserted by him, and left with their little boy among the cruel savages, she had felt the anguish and misery of a hundred deaths.

He had escaped, and when in his power to aid them, had said never a word to them on the ship, out to which he swam, of the wife and son left upon that island to die, as he believed and hoped.

But Fate, though bitterly cruel to the woman and her boy, had not wholly deserted them, and in time they two got away.

It were better perhaps, had they remained there among the savages, innocent then of evil themselves, than come away to become what they had.

Their sufferings had made them reckless of all</

good, their desertion by father and husband had made them revengeful, and thus had crime after crime been added to their lives until their hearts became blackened with infamy.

The man, the husband and father, carrying the memory of his evil desertion ever in his heart, certainly could not turn his life to good, and to drown his conscience, he had embarked in an existence that was most sinful.

Fortune had favored him, however, and he had grown rich.

But his vast riches were really all gained by the wants and miseries of others.

His gold had accumulated rapidly, and he bought with it such peace of mind as he could; but happiness could never come to him he well knew.

When he discovered that his wife and son had not only escaped from the island, where he had deserted them, but were revengeful toward him, his cowardly fear of death had caused him to fly to another abiding-place, where he could settle down in luxury and enjoy life as best he might.

Those were not the days of fast mails, pleasure travel and telegraph, and he knew it would be an accident if he was found out.

Thus it was that he had purchased his elegant villa home near San Augustine, and become known as a Spanish Don of vast wealth.

But his guilty fears were again aroused, and he turned his home into a monastery, put on the garb of a padre, and sought thus to be hidden from his enemies, at least until such enemies could be gotten rid of.

Thus the pretended padre was not sincere in his repentance.

Intended for the priesthood in early life, he could deceive those about him by his pretended knowledge, while his gift of his home, his charities and assumed goodness made him popular with all and he was considered a good man.

Meeting the woman whom he had so wronged, and to save himself from her knife, he at once pleaded repentance and his calling.

Her memory of the past respect she had had for religion saved the man, and the woman fled from him, even believing him to be sincere.

But alas! she was woefully mistaken, for the pretended padre was determined to no longer suffer through fear of her.

Almost the instant that she had fled from him, he sprung into the deep shadow of a building near, drew from beneath his robe a small bundle, and in a minute's time came out into the light of a shop window, no longer in padre's attire, but with the long beard, hair and garb of a street beggar, such as in those days wandered through the land seeking alms.

With a speed which his looks belied he went in pursuit of the woman and saw her meet her son and run out to the vessel he had purchased.

Instantly he sprung in a shore-boat and followed.

He saw the little schooner that they boarded, and that there seemed to be no one else on her decks.

Drawing as near as he dared he noted the craft well, and saw her get under way and leave the harbor.

"They are alive, that is certain, and now is the time for my revenge."

"I heard the boy say something about the crew having deserted and stolen the treasure-chest, and it must be so, to have those two sail alone in that craft."

"But I will follow them, and have their lives, and then peace will be mine."

"Ha! ha! ha! at last will I be able to live," and the man moved rapidly back to the shore.

As he reached it, he saw a group of four men, watching the departure of the little schooner.

Their manner showed this, and approaching them he said:

"Any friends of yours in yonder little craft gliding seaward, lads?"

They saw his gray hair and beard, and respected it, as a sailor will ever do, and answered:

"Friends they might be, señor; but we are glad to see them go."

"You knew them then?"

"As shipmates with them for a long time past."

"A woman and her son?"

"A woman and a young man, and they are evil enough to be mother and son, though they never said they were as much, and her face we never saw," answered the spokesman of the party.

"Well, lads, how would you like to make some gold for yourselves?"

That is what we are after, señor; but how is it to be done?"

"Pursue and capture yonder craft."

"There is no gold on her," said the man, with a laugh, in which his comrades joined.

"No, for you just robbed the craft of the gold chest," was the cool rejoinder.

The men started and gazed at the supposed old man, while their hands instinctively dropped upon their sword-hilts.

"Be careful, lads, for I am not alone; but I do not want your gold; on the contrary I will give you more if you will help me to capture yonder craft."

"No, we are satisfied with what we have, and besides, we don't wish more to do with yonder pair, as we believe they have to do with Satan."

"Well, my men, I will give you gold in plenty, to board a craft here and aid me to capture yonder woman and her son, and I will prove to you how harmless they are."

"We can't go, señor."

"Oh yes you will, for I am a Government officer, and am on their track and yours."

"If you go with me, you get free; but if you re-

fus', you shall be arrested, your stolen gold shall be taken from you, and more, your necks will be stretched as wreckers."

"What do you say, lads?"

The men were taken aback.

They saw that the pretended old man seemed to know all about them.

They could see no one else near, but believed that he had allies, and after glancing at his comrades, the spokesman said:

"You've got us, señor; so we go with you."

"What say you, lads?"

The others nodded assent, and the bold man who had thus gained them for his purpose bade them enter his boat.

This they did, and were rowed rapidly up the harbor to where a pretty pleasure-craft lay at anchor.

It was a sloop, and but one man was on board, evidently in charge.

"Ho, Diego, my son, it is I, the Padre Infelix, and I want the yacht."

"Tell the superior that important duty called me away, and I will explain upon my return," said the pretended priest, addressing the yacht's keeper.

"Yes, Señor Padre, I will tell him."

"Say nothing to any one else of my going, Diego."

"No, señor."

The keeper now left the sloop in the boat the party had come off in, and ten minutes after the pretty little vessel was flying seaward in chase of the schooner on which was the Woman in Black and her son Perdido.

When the dawn broke the schooner was sighted, but nearly two leagues in advance, and she was under full sail, flying rapidly along.

But the yacht was certainly gaining, though slowly, and the padre skipper muttered:

"We will overhaul them by night, lads, and then for your gold"—and he added in an inaudible tone:

"And my revenge!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CHASE AND THE RESULT.

THE prediction of the padre was not a true one, for the schooner held her own pretty well with the little sloop yacht, though the latter certainly gained slowly.

When the mother and son on the schooner discovered that there was a vessel evidently in chase they became white with fear.

Who it was they could not guess.

They felt that it was not Bonodel, the Boy Rover, or he would have pursued in his Flagless Schooner, and thus have readily overtaken them.

Could it be the Water Wolf his wife and son?

It seemed more likely, and then their thoughts turned upon their old crew and they came to the conclusion that they, having gotten the chest of gold, were coming in pursuit to again rob them.

They hoped that this was the case, and that it was not the Boy Rover or the Water Wolves.

Then a thought flashed across the brain of the Woman in Black.

"Can it be that man?" she almost gasped.

After awhile she said in hoarse tones:

"Perdido, whoever they are in yonder boat, there is no surrender for us."

"I would rather surrender and take chances of escaping afterwards, than take certain death."

"Well, you shall take no chances, boy, for if it comes to the worst you shall die by my own hand, and then will I take my own life," was the woman's savage response, and at it the young man turned deadly pale.

When night fell upon the sea the two vessels were not more than half a league apart, and the wind was growing lighter each moment.

The lighter the breeze, the more the yacht gained; but only for awhile, as the wind died out utterly.

It was in vain that the padre cast his eyes aloft and watched the sails.

They hung listless and not a movement was upon the waters, to indicate that there was a breath of air.

"Get out the sweeps, men," ordered the padre.

But the men demurred at this, saying very justly:

"We've gained steadily, señor, and when there is wind we can catch 'em; but the night is too hot for hard work when the game is about in our hands."

The padre begged, but it was of no use.

He stormed, yet the men obeyed not.

He offered to give more gold; but they wished rest and refused it.

So they had their rest for long hours, as the calm never broke until dawn.

Then a ripple came upon the waters and the crew sprang to their work.

The yacht got it first and was within half a mile of the schooner when she felt the breeze.

Then it too began to glide through the waters.

Suddenly the schooner was seen to luff up.

What could it mean?

Then it started upon its course again, to once more run up into the wind.

In the darkness of early dawn her decks could not be seen; but as she continued these strange manœuvres for some time, the padre cried:

"I have it! they are asleep below decks."

"We have them, lads!"

In ten minutes more the yacht ran alongside the schooner, and the padre and his men sprung on board, their cutlasses in hand.

But no one met them.

"Great God! they have escaped me— Ha! what is this?"

It was a note, written in a woman's hand, and addressed to:

"DON RUDOLPH RAMON."

It read:

"Death is preferable to a hunted life."

"Recognizing in the old man on the yacht your worst foe, and knowing that death awaits us at your hands, we seek a more merciful end by springing into the sea, and thus thwarting you."

"The curses of a wife and son rest upon you."

The man glanced at the words, and thus stood for a long time.

At last he said in a low tone:

"The schooner's boat is here, and so they cannot have escaped and would not have dared trust themselves upon the sea."

"Yes, it is like her to die thus, and so let it be."

Then turning to his crew, he ordered three of them on board the schooner, and the other and himself took charge of the yacht, and the two vessels started upon their return to the harbor they had left.

Arriving there in safety, the pretended padre paid the men their promised gold; but the thought was still upon his mind that the Woman in Black and Perdido yet lived, and he once more returned to the seclusion of his monastery.

CHAPTER XX.

NOT DEAD.

WHEN the calm came on the Woman in Black and Perdido watched their vessel even more anxiously than had the padre his, in the vain hope that it was still moving.

But no, there was not the faintest breath of air.

Eagerly the mother and son then glanced at the distant yacht, and the woman smiled grimly as she said:

"They will come in their boats now."

"Yes."

"But cannot take us."

"Cannot?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I counted those on board."

"Well?"

"There are but five."

"And we but two."

"They are in an open boat, and we can stand in the companionway and pick them off."

"Ha! that is a good idea."

"So it is, and we will escape after all."

"I hope so."

"Well, my son, prepare for them."

"How?"

"See that our weapons are all right."

This was done and the two waited.

But no boat put off from the sloop.

At length the woman walked forward and her eyes fell upon an object on deck, concealed by a large piece of canvas.

Throwing this off she beheld a life-skiff.

In it were oars, a small mast and sail, and the little boat was evidently one that could weather a severe blow.

A moment the woman stood in silence.

Then she called her son to her.

"Do you see that?"

"Yes it is a life-skiff; the men told me it was intended for a lighthouse down the coast, and I promised to send it ashore in the morning."

"Thank Heaven you did not, for it will come in well now."

"How?"

"We will save our lives in it."

"I do not see how."

"You are obtuse, boy."

"Which the Water Wolves have just left?"

"Yes."

"A guard may have been left there by the Boy Rover."

"I think not; but if so, we can go elsewhere."

"Where?"

"That we will determine, nupon if we find the island occupied."

"And if not, will it not be visited again?"

"It is very hard to find any one bold enough to pilot a craft in there."

"The girl wrecker will not do it again, and with this boat we can live ready to depart at a moment's notice, for I shall find some hiding-place in the wall of the cliff outside, where we can keep the life-boat, and reach it by a ladder."

"You know well how to plot, mother; but I fear to stay there."

"There is another course open to you, boy."

"What is that?"

"If you have the pluck you can turn pirate."

"Well, I'll think of it."

"Remain on the island with me, until there is less excitement than now, and then I will give you gems you can turn into gold, and get a vessel with."

"You can go to Havana for a craft, or to Vera Cruz, and try piracy, and my word for it, after you have been at it for awhile, you will be glad enough to return to the Death Rock and pass the rest of your days with the old Wrecker Witch."

"And do you expect to thus pass your days, mother?"

"No, for when I get gold enough, I shall seek a home elsewhere and live a life of luxury."

"But I must be forgotten first, boy."

Thus they talked, while the life-skiff sped on.

Night found them making six knots an hour, upon their way, and in good time they came in sight of the Death Rock.

No sign of life was visible on the barren-looking island; but the woman was too wary to go there by day, so awaited until nightfall, when she ran into the little basin.

Landing, they found the place deserted, and at once settled themselves down in comparative safety for the night.

With the dawn their first efforts were to arrange a place for the life-skiff upon the south side, to which they could fly, should a vessel enter the basin, and then they were content to remain there, carrying on the evil life of wreckers, and heaping up their booty as time went by from the destruction of vessels that trusted in their false beacon.

Thus we must leave them, awaiting the punishment that must some time come to them—for sooner or later crime meets its just punishment—while we return to the cruise of Bonodel, the Boy Rover, in search of his dearly-loved sister.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WATER WOLF'S CONFESSION.

UNDER the guidance of the wrecker, who had sold himself to Mark Bonodel, to pilot the Flagless Schooner in chase of the crippled sloop, the pursuit was kept up, though slowly.

The man, as he had said, was not able to run by night, through the intricate channels, and thus the sloop, if it sailed during the darkness, was drawing ahead.

But the schooner's speed by day would, they hoped, make up for the gain of the sloop by night, and thus, in the long run, overhaul her.

As the Flagless Schooner was gliding along one afternoon, in sight of a large island, a four-knot breeze blowing at the time, Mark Bonodel and his lieutenant were attentively watching the shores with their glasses.

They did not know but that the sloop might be hidden somewhere in-shore, and consequently kept up a careful search.

"Sutro, turn your glass upon the shore, under that white cliff, and see if you do not observe some one or something moving there in the bushes."

Sutro at once obeyed, and almost immediately called out:

"Yes, sir, I see three persons there."

"Ay, and they are waving to us."

"Ho, lads, we will run toward yonder island, as close as we dare go, so put her head that way, helmsman."

"Ay, ay, sir," called out the helmsman, and the bows of the schooner were at once headed shoreward.

As they drew nearer three persons were discovered upon the island.

"There are two men and a woman," said Sutro.

"Yes, and they move about as though they were suffering; order my boat ready, Mr. Sutro, as soon as we come to anchor."

Half an hour after Mark Bonodel sprung ashore and was met by a heavily-bearded man, who cried earnestly:

"Is not that a vessel-of-war, sir?"

"Not exactly, my man; but who are you, and what are you doing here?" asked the Boy Captain.

"My name is Hart, sir, and with my wife and son we were wrecked on a vessel, by a false beacon."

"We have managed to save ourselves in a boat, sir, but drifted here, were cast ashore, and are nearly starved."

"Well, my poor fellow, you shall soon have food and care, and then you will come out all right, I hope."

"Now call your wife and son and return on board my schooner with me, for you do indeed look half-starved."

"We are, sir," said the man, and his wife and son having approached, though slowly, for they looked haggard and as though they suffered, the three soon found themselves in comfortable quarters on

board the schooner, which at once stood on her way again.

The elderly man, the one who had met Mark Bonodel at the shore when he landed, having had some food and been given a sailor's suit of clothing, came on deck looking greatly refreshed, and Mark Bonodel said to him:

"I am glad to see you better, Mr. Hart, and trust your wife and son are improving?"

"We all are, sir, thanks to you."

"May I ask if you saw a small sloop pass your island the past week?"

"I did, sir," and the man's face darkened.

"The one I refer to had been dismasted, and was sailing under a jury-mast."

"It was the same, sir."

"How long since?"

"Six days, sir."

"Are we on her track?"

"Yes, sir, you head as she pointed after leaving the island; but are you in chase of her?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what she is?"

"I have an idea that she is an outlaw craft."

"And as a Government cruiser you seek her capture?"

"Mr. Hart, this is not a Government cruiser, sir; for, as you see, I sail without a flag."

"I so notice, sir."

"I will tell you frankly just who and what I am, sir."

"Years ago I had a happy home, loving parents, and a beautiful baby sister."

"We were rich and happy; but a snake came into our home, one who pretended to be my father's friend."

"He loved my mother, and he sought my father's ruin and death that he might marry her."

"Ruin my father he did, and then killed him, and we were turned out into the world because my mother refused to become the wife of that man."

"I was a mere child then, and did not understand all as I do now."

"But that man caused my little sister to be kidnapped from our humble abode, and the shock killed my mother."

"I went to sea for years, and in every port tried to find little Lita—"

The man started, and asked quickly:

"What was the name of your little sister?"

"Lita."

"Ah, yes; a pretty name."

"At last I went back to New Orleans, and gained employment in the office of the very man who had done me and mine this base wrong."

"I hoped to find out what he had done with my sister, but could not."

"He did not know me, grown as I was to almost manhood, and he made me his confidential clerk, so that in the end I had my revenge, but how it matters not."

"Then I got this schooner, seizing her from her pirate captain, and am sailing about the world in search of my sister."

"Some nights ago I came upon the dismasted sloop I now am in chase of, and from a girl on board one of my men stole this locket and chain."

"It was about her neck when she was kidnapped, and was the only trinket my mother had not sold to buy bread, for it contained the likeness of herself and my father."

"The sloop was gone when I discovered the theft of the locket, but I am in chase of her, and Heaven grant I find her, and in the young girl, my sister Lita."

"The gentleman is strangely like you, sir, and the lady I almost feel as though I had seen, for I know one who is her very picture," said the man, looking at the likeness.

"You do? and where is she?" eagerly asked Mark Bonodel.

The man was silent a moment, and then he said:

"Would you be willing to give a round sum for the finding of your sister, sir?"

"Yes, gladly."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Are you able to make it more?"

"Yes, I will double it."

"And will promise to land myself, wife and son in San Augustine?"

"Gladly."

"Giving no clew to the Government that we are other than I have represented?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I have told you a lie, for my name is not Hart, nor were we wrecked."

"On the contrary, we have been wreckers ourselves, and were landed upon that island by a woman who was our foe."

"She sought revenge upon us, and found us on our sloop, which had been dismasted in a storm."

"She left us on that island to starve to death, while she sailed back to an island, to take possession of it, and there became rich by leading vessels to wreck upon it through a false beacon."

"But my wife, self and son were not the only ones that were on the island of which I speak, for there was one other."

"That other was a person whom I found on board a wreck which drove ashore one night."

"She was being taken somewhere as the adopted child of one who was coming for her at the time, but who lost his life."

"She was then about eight years old, and wore that locket and chain."

"Great God! my sister!" cried Mark Bonodel.

"Assuredly, sir, for she is the image of your mother here in this locket."

"And where is she now?"

"The woman kept her on board the sloop, when she put us ashore."

"But, under your promise of twenty thousand, sir, and our release, I will pilot you to the Death Rock, where you will find your sister."

Gladly did Mark Bonodel listen to the confession of the Water Wolf, and agree to his terms, and the Flagless Schooner was at once put under his charge and headed for the Death Rock, where Wambold felt certain that the Woman in Black had gone, to carry on the cruel work of wrecking the winged skimmers of the sea.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

THAT Wambold the Water Wolf kept his word, and guided Mark Bonodel to the Death Rock, the reader had already surmised, when he remembers that Perdido saw the Flagless Schooner run into the harbor of San Augustine and drop anchor, and four persons besides her Boy Captain, row ashore, and whose names seemed to frighten the Woman in Black into seeking a haven of refuge where no one could find her.

The Flagless Schooner had run in by night into the secret basin with the Water Wolf at the helm, and upon rising in the morning, the beautiful girl wrecker had been confronted by her own brother, who had landed and approached the cabin whither Wambold had directed him.

But of the meeting of the two, the brother's story to the sister, so long lost to him, and then of the dawning remembrance in her mind which brought him back to her as he had been in childhood, I will not speak, but hasten on to tell how, after a few days' stay at the Death Rock Island, the Flagless Schooner had sailed, with Lita on board, along with the Water Wolf and his family, and headed for San Augustine.

Arriving there the Water Wolf had been paid his price and set free, together with his wife and son, and they hastened to depart for other scenes, while Mark Bonodel, seeking the officer of the American Cruiser Sea Owl, then in port, took him to the inn where Lita was, and told him the story of his search, and turned over to him the Flagless Schooner as a prize.

Then the two, the brother and sister, mysteriously disappeared, the young captain of the Sea Owl believing that Mark Bonodel was anxious to remain unknown, fearing punishment for himself for his killing, as he supposed, Rudolpho, the money-lender, and for his lovely sister as the girl wrecker of the Bahamas. See companion story "The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for the Gold Island."

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